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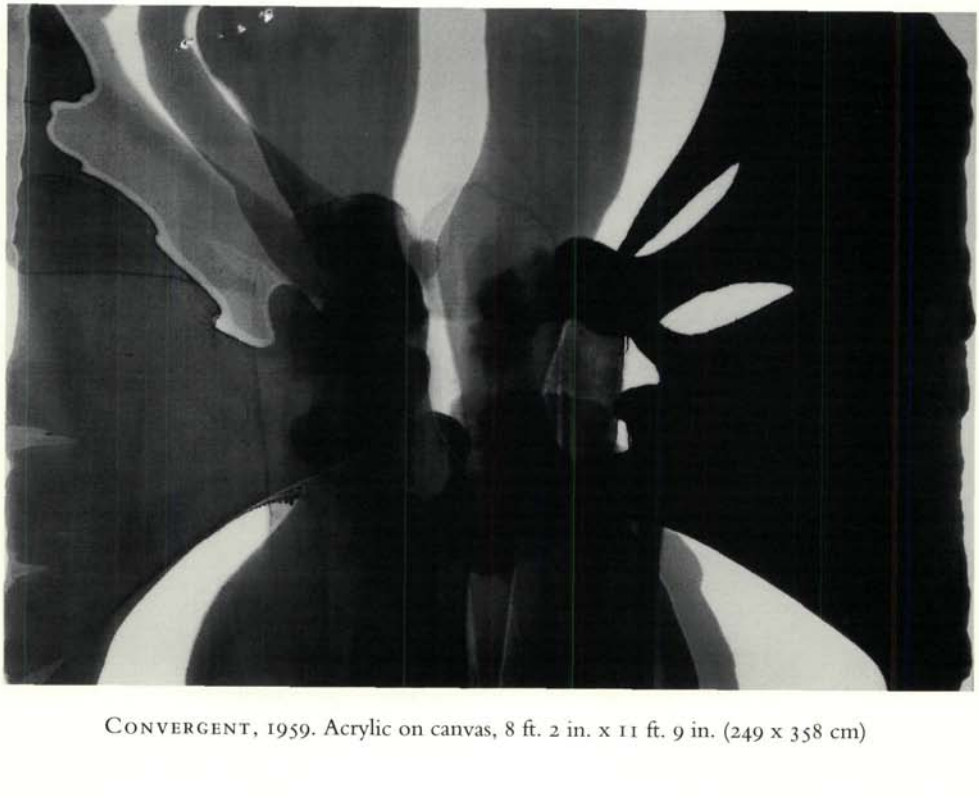

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Editor's Note: We regret the misspelling of W. Morton Fullerton's name; the misidentification of the year of publication of *Edith Wharton and Henry James. The Story of Their Friendship* (1965) by Millicent Bell; and the erroneous reference to a footnote about Chateaubriand in *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters, 1900-1915* edited by Lyall H. Powers (PR/4, 1991, p. 729 and 732).

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COMMENT

Education without Politics Multiculturalism and diversity, which used to be just words, recently have turned into loaded concepts; what now is subsumed under "politically correct" was a term the New Left had used in the 1960s and then forgotten, until reintroduced by the media. In fact, when I felt compelled to propose a conference, "The Changing Culture of the University," a little over two years ago, I partly did so because I became aware that some colleagues who innocently questioned, during the course of a faculty meeting, the introduction of a new course on intellectual or pedagogic grounds were being dismissed as "racist." And I was perturbed further by the fact that afterward these colleagues would walk out of the meeting in anger and soon withdrew from faculty affairs and committees. Ultimately, scores of professors became alienated and restricted themselves to teaching their classes.

Among other things, our conference, "The Changing Culture of the University," in November 1990 was designed to air these issues, to uncover what was under the proverbial rug. A month later, Richard Bernstein, in *The New York Times*, described the dominance of those whom Roger Kimball has called "the tenured radicals" as "politically correct." The term has stuck, and come to mean everything and nothing. When I was invited to over a dozen radio talk shows on the subject last spring, one host started out by stating that "we all know there are politically correct people on the right and on the left"; another opened up by questioning the viability of universities given that they "don't teach students how to hold on to jobs"; and yet another insisted I solve the problems inherent in nursery schools through graduate programs – all in an hour that included commercials for cars and dress shops, a news summary, and the weather. This is not to say that these hosts did a bad job, but to point out, once again, how hopeless it is to try educating our population via the media, how thin the lines are dividing information, entertainment, and politics.

We all know that media coverage is useful and necessary; that it leads to the public discussions which are imperative in a democracy, if only to pass legislation that may remedy – and often hopelessly worsen and complicate – any subject that happens to be on the table. So, whatever topic gets aired soon is being transformed into politics, beginning with who is invited on what show, how many from each side are represented, who is the host, and so on. This inevitable politicization, stemming from the need to educate via the media, has induced a great deal of posturing about the state of higher education. These conditions do not tend to further integration and understanding. True, the media, just like *Partisan Review*, invites protagonists with diverse viewpoints in order to have them

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argue. But they are obliged to put on a good show for as large an audience as possible, and, as I came to realize during my own radio interviews, tend to draw in people who are more or less uninformed, listeners who don't want to give up their *parti-pris* positions – many of these "learned" from other media events.

For instance, immediately after the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney, and the Dean of the Graduate Faculty at Rutgers University, Catharine Stimpson, had their heated dialogue about "political correctness" on public television, friends from outside the university asked me what I thought of the exchange and proceeded to give me their own opinions. Invariably, those on the so-called left were appalled that Cheney had interrupted Stimpson while those on the so-called right pointed out that Stimpson was purposely hugging the screen, being unnecessarily long-winded to keep Cheney from talking. They commented on Stimpson's sugary tone and on Cheney's belligerent one. Very few of my friends any longer questioned the notions and validity of political correctness, multiculturalism, and diversity as the means of addressing the larger problems we face – how to educate an ever-expanding college population many of whom, for a variety of reasons, are unprepared for college.

Nor did my friends realize that their own fervor and interest in these discussions, in a vague sense, were replicating the positions they used to take towards communism and anticommunism before the collapse of the Soviet empire. And while those on the left – correctly – pointed out that their opponents on the right had not engineered this collapse all by themselves, as some of them claimed or implied, they chose to forget that before 1989 they themselves had applied the word "empire" to America alone. Now, they chose to ignore their former excuses for repression in what used to be the countries behind the Iron Curtain, and they started to focus their not inconsiderable political savvy only on what's wrong with America. The fact that their stranglehold on faculty and administrations (not on students, as seems to be the emphasis in media events) was being challenged, just at the time when they did not know where to position themselves in the larger arena, and when those who used to be our enemies started to look to us as the most liberal society, led some to jump ship. It led others to question their positions and yet others to concentrate on political correctness, on "multiculturalism" as the weapon against existing racism, and on the teaching of "diversity" as the equivalent of tolerance. (How this position will "translate" into dealing with the upsurge of nationalism and racism in Central and Eastern Europe remains to be seen.)

No one questions the good intentions and the ends. It is unfortunate, however, that once again our national agenda is being set in

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terms of a left/right confrontation rather than in the cooperation I – somewhat too idealistically – had envisioned when planning our conference. For I had thought that the collapse of communism might bring with it the collapse of false dichotomies – among these the recognition that to improve our educational system we would have to give up, or at least alter, our political and pseudo–political agendas. Instead, entrenched interest groups and the concomitant enmities continue to determine the scope of the discussions, claiming to speak for constituencies who don't always understand that the rhetoric of their advocates is mostly self-serving and may even be counterproductive. For instance, by rewriting history from a multicultural perspective (by now this term refers to African culture alone), we not only will be creating jobs for African American historians and their advocates, but for all the book publishers and sellers (on both the right and the left). And we are setting the stage for the creation of thousands of university committees and conferences. Actually, this is happening already, and not only among historians.

Again, I must reiterate that I am neither against preserving and celebrating every heritage nor against bolstering the self-esteem of every student. But I do assume that children learn about their own traditions at home and in their communities and about those of others in school – from classmates and teachers. Originally, affirmative action was to help this process: it started to be questioned only after it was noticed that Asian and other emigrants continued to integrate without the benefit of preferential treatment or quotas (again, what we call this depends upon our political stance). The historians' battle over the American heritage overlooks, among other things, the fact that whatever kind of history is being taught – be it by advocates of the old or the new historicisms, by those who claim that European civilization started in Central Africa, or in Egypt, or in some as-yet unexplored tribal society – it must be learned by students who have no problems in reading and writing essays and generally have a certain respect for learning, and even for those who know enough to teach. Privately, even my friends on the far left agree with me. But they don't like to call remedial work "remedial work," and instead they speak of offering "academic foundations," "retention programs," "windows of opportunity," and so on. I would not object, except for the fact that when aired in the media, these euphemisms again blur the difficulties and the complexities.

So far as I know, no one wants to have a divided society, and everyone recognizes the need to eliminate our underclass: remedial programs mandated by Congress and state legislatures – however badly worded or implemented – testify to this. But even the most well-meaning and dedicated legislators and academics tend not to call things by their names. A number of black leaders now are advocating help for

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those who want to help themselves; they could show the way and motivate their fellow blacks to turn over a new leaf. But they need support in order to combat entrenched interests.

As long as we allow terms like multiculturalism and diversity and questions of discussions about textbooks to blur the fact that American students are being shortchanged, as long as we allow the reputations of those who don't get onto the bandwagon to be besmirched, we will replace one type of dichotomous thinking for another, one way of miseducating our young for another. In the academy, our American left has been successful in cornering the political discourse, in part by insisting that "the personal is the political," in part by holding on to its role as victim long after it has won the ideological war. If, however, its ideology were to be replaced by its good intentions, we might be well on our way to better educating our students without giving up our research, yet another unnecessary and unrealistic dichotomy: we do have the necessary structures and professors in our colleges and universities for both. All we have to do is to recognize that even though we need political discourse, education itself must be put above politics.

Unfortunately, this is not about to happen. The most talked about public debate on television, hosted by Fred Friendly, focussed not on the subtle intimidation of colleagues by the politically correct, but on what has come to be called the regulation of hate speech, mostly by students. Such a focus appears to take separatism by racial and ethnic groups (often fueled by a member of the faculty) for granted, and ignores that the Civil Rights Act of 1954 set out to eliminate all segregation. (The reestablishment of special schools for young black males, some of whom are deemed uneducable, is yet another step into the ghetto-oriented past we want to undo.) Richard Delgado, a lawyer, argued in an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (9/18/91), that "regulation of hate speech may be necessary to guarantee equal protection to all citizens," by extrapolating from the Fourteenth Amendment. Others, he explained, maintain that such regulations may interfere with the rights granted under the First Amendment, which guarantees free speech. Unfortunately, all the debaters on television also end up deferring to the lawyers and thereby are confirming that what used to be questions of civility and social conscience – qualities we are expected to develop in families and to strengthen in schools – must be transformed into legal ones. Wasn't the Constitution as valid when, as a new emigrant and student at City College, I was subjected to racial slurs – either kiddingly or in anger? Did we ignore them or take them in stride – name-calling felt as bad then as it does now – because our society was not yet as over-legalized as it has become? We no longer seem to have "the good sense and the practical judgment . . . to elude the numberless difficulties resulting from

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[our] Federal Constitution," which Tocqueville admired over one hundred-fifty years ago.

The same issue of *The Chronicle* recaps the controversy over Carol Iannone's appointment as a member of the NEH Council. Her opponents, "led by the Modern Language Association and the American Council for Learned Societies denied that they had rejected her for political reasons." But a few paragraphs below, the executive director of the MLA said her group was "more determined than ever to speak up when it seems appropriate to do so . . . [and] is considering expanding the conditions that would prompt it to oppose nominees to include political balance." Her *confrères,* according to another article, a few pages later, are about to found a new organization: twenty-four professors, in English and the humanities, expect to "set the record straight about such incendiary issues as 'political correctness' and free speech on campus." They deny that left-wingers were or had been trying to squelch dissent on college campuses, and they are in the process of organizing their troops around the country. (The formation of another such group, advocating "politicized readings of literature, popular culture and the media" was reported in the November 6, 1991 issue.) I had hoped that, instead, they too would realize that we need less politics in the university rather than more, fewer academic interest groups rather than more, in order to face up to the fact that students aren't taught enough to function effectively. (Tocqueville appears already to have implied as much.) If they could abandon their ideology for just a few hours a week, they might be able to stop posturing for personal ends (even though such ends must be pursued to get tenure and promotions), and to recognize that it is more important to be educationally correct than politically correct. I do not mean to propose yet another slogan, but to suggest that we all work together. The central issue is not European culture versus multiculture, singularity versus diversity, but education.

Education never has been associated with brainwashing; its aim always has been to open up minds, to make the foreign familiar. This includes the recognition that European civilization may have survived for as long as it did precisely because it always was open to other cultures, that it not only preserved the ideas discussed in Athens and Rome, but was fascinated with foreign knowledge (which it imported from China, India and Africa, among others), and that there never was a fixed canon. Had Jesse Jackson been aware of this, he might not have started the ruckus with his "Ho, ho, Western Civ. has got to go." He might have said, instead, "Ho, ho, let's learn all there is to know." But whatever he or anyone else might say, it's time to drop the politics of higher education and to pick up the books – any and all books. **E. K.**

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Part of the problem with the debate over multiculturalism is that it is not being conducted in good faith by the politically correct academics. Now two groups have been formed to combat "the conservative reaction," led by Gerald Graff and Stanley Aronowitz. But they gloss over the actual arguments.

Irving Kristol, in an excellent piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, recently pointed out that the radical academics are arguing in bad faith. If all they were propounding, as they claim publicly, is that the country contains several cultural and ethnic groups and that educational practices should recognize this, then there would be no argument. But it must be emphasized that the politically correct teachers actually are denouncing the traditions and values of the West and of America as being the work of "dead, white males," and that they would substitute African and Asian traditions and values. They deny that there is a viable cultural consensus that should be at the core of every curriculum. This consensus is not frozen, but it does not change endlessly. And it is not dead. Yet if we ignore our own cultural past, then indeed we will be culturally dead.

★

Toward the end of his essay on *Howards End*, Alfred Kazin changes direction and makes some remarks about the New York Intellectuals' abandonment of the radical tradition and their conversion to neoconservatism. In this connection, I think it should be noted that the abandonment of communism – and socialism – in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe should provide the final justification for the abandonment of much of the radical tradition. In addition, the fact is that what is known as radicalism today has taken on a number of fashionable and politically correct causes and ideas that were not part of the radical tradition.

I think Kazin also misreads Lionel Trilling. Trilling preferred the novel of social manners as it manifested itself in Jane Austen and other English writers to the kind of realism, for example, he associated with Theodore Dreiser. This view of fiction seems to me to be arguable but not necessarily priggish. ★

As John Gross reminded us several years ago, the man of letters is a dying species, being supplanted by the theorists who follow the latest trends in academic discourse.

It was a pleasure, therefore, to read *along the riverrun*, the collection of essays by Richard Ellmann, who died a few years ago, which combines impressive scholarship with a critical mastery. As the excellent biographer of Joyce and Wilde, Ellmann established himself as an outstanding

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scholar, but his essays bring another dimension into his writing: a graceful and discursive treatment of a number of literary themes. I do not recall the reviews the book received on publication, though my impression is that they were respectful but perfunctory, in keeping with the decline in prestige of the man of letters.

The essays range from "The Uses of Decadence," in which Ellmann points to the strain in Yeats, Wilde, and Joyce that separated itself from the dominant sensibility inherited from the Victorians, to some personal anecdotes about several writers. There is an amusing and revealing piece on the relation of Eliot to Pound, which makes the interesting point that Pound could do for Eliot – either as editor or promoter – what Eliot couldn't do for Pound. Another essay discusses the gap between Yeats and Auden and the ambivalence of Auden and his poetic group towards Yeats. There's an essay on Frank O'Connor that gives him his literary due without inflating him. One on D. H. Lawrence is refreshingly irreverent.

Another essay explores the uses of psychoanalysis in the writing of biography, in which Ellmann deftly observes both the insights that Freudian doctrine brings to the study of writers and the limitations in the application of this method. Ellmann calls attention to the fact, for example, that Ben Jonson and Hemingway, two different writers, were probably anal-erotic. Maybe, says Ellmann, in an attempt to resolve this dilemma, all writers are anal-erotic. On the other hand, in discussing Henry James, Ellmann questions the Freudian idea that homosexuality involves fixation on the mother, by citing Leon Edel, who claims there was no such fixation by James. Ellmann also makes the interesting point that though Sartre had important reservations about Freudian theory, particularly in rejecting the idea of the unconscious, he made considerable use of it in his study of Flaubert.

Particularly graceful and informative is Ellmann's account of a visit to Yeats' widow, George, while working on a study of Yeats. Ellmann's description of the main women in Yeats's life, his wife, Maud Gonne, his failed love, and her daughter Iseult, is masterful. Then there is a close reading of Wallace Stevens in which Ellmann makes a subtle connection between his life and his work, through the theme of death, which figures frequently in both.

It is difficult to summarize Ellmann's essays, because he was not an ideological critic. Unlike Leavis or Trilling or Wilson, he had no thematic agendas. Perhaps that removes him from the first order of criticism. Still, his combination of scholarly and critical perception make him one of the important figures in the history of the literary essay.

W. P.

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CZESLAW MILOSZ

On Nationalism

A famous manifesto of 1848 began with the words: "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of Communism." Now, at the end of the twentieth century, looking back at the history of many decades, we recognize the validity of those words written by Marx and Engels. From our perspective, however, another statement would have also been true: "A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of nationalism." It is an open question as to which of those two specters has proved its greater ability to become reality. However, while many thousands of pages have been dedicated to Communism, nationalism remains elusive, not openly confronted, and even shameful. In view of the magnitude of evil perpetrated in the name of a nation confronting another nation, as well as the absurd doctrines justifying the unique vocation of one's own nation, that reticence in recognizing the importance of the phenomenon is understandable. And yet wherever we look in the world today we see the extreme vitality of various nationalisms engaging human lives and making people ready to die in the name of a given nation.

At the end of the eighteenth century the word *nation* started to attract attention because the French nation was a great motoric force in the history of that period. The French nation was bound by the ideals of the rights of man and of the French Revolution; to be a Frenchman meant to make a choice, and in fact foreigners would proclaim themselves Frenchmen because they shared the revolutionary ideal. Spawned in a way by the philosophers of the French Enlightenment, the Revolution was bringing forward a peculiar commitment to the universal ideas of brotherhood, of equality, and of liberty as a bond of all who belonged to *la nation*. All of us who like myself have been primarily engaged in the history of literature rather than the study of history itself are aware of the central role played by Romanticism in Europe, especially in East Central Europe. *Nation* in Romanticism means something very different from *la*

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nation in the French sense. The origins of Romanticism were in Germany, and the first Romantics were students and young poets – humiliated by the defeats inflicted on Germany by Napoleon. I wonder whether someone will write a book on the rebellious groups of the so-called Young Germany with their fanaticism, burning of books, and killing of colleagues suspected of treason, in light of what we were able to observe in the leftist and terroristic movements in West Germany in the 1960s. Romanticism introduced the notion of the ineffable national soul that supposedly determines a given man's belonging to a nation. It was not the free choice of an individual but his birth which was the decisive factor. One was a member of a given nation by virtue of being born on a given soil, from parents of the same language as their ancestors, also because one shared the destiny of a tribe, of a race, or, as some would say, of a common historical fate. Romanticism in its political aspect was nothing else than nationalism. Perhaps only now do we embrace the implication of certain slogans popular in the epoch. Romanticism was fostered by special groups of people, and their status throws light not only upon the origins of nationalism but also on its long history including our century. Those young enthusiasts were mostly students and young literati. And undoubtedly a distinction introduced by Ernest Gellner can be useful here, a distinction between the two cultures: the so-called higher or written culture and the so-called lower or oral culture. Precisely at the moment of passage from the oral culture to the written culture in Europe, nationalism was born. And it is significant that pupils of high schools and universities were its promoters while the mass of the population was largely steeped in oral culture. It was regarded by those enthusiasts on the one hand as preserving the true national soul in its folklore, on the other hand as a passive flock to be lifted up through education toward the common goal of national dignity or national independence.

For centuries the written culture was limited to the clergy and the upper classes while the majority remained on the oral level. In some countries the higher culture was of a language different from the language of the population; thus, for example, German dominated the scene in Bohemia, in Latvia, in Estonia, while in Lithuania the same place was occupied by Polish. National movements in such countries were fostered by the new intelligentsia coming from the lower classes and speaking the language of their peasant ancestors.

If it is true that the humiliation felt by young educated people as a group is usually at the source of nationalism or political romanticism, we can find a common denominator in the movements among the intelligentsia of various countries, both the countries temporarily subjugated by big powers and the big powers themselves, thus in Germany, in Poland,

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in Hungary, in Bohemia, but also in Russia. After all, there are parallels between national bards who appeared at that time and whom we can call *linguistic* heroes, such as Mickiewicz, Petöfi, and Pushkin. Somebody once said that Poland, after it disappeared from the map of Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, was invented anew by a few poets.

Let us consider the enormous role of literature in the development of the so-called national consciousness. Its dominance confirms the thesis that nationalism is closely related to the existence of schools in which the young are submitted to a special indoctrination based upon the texts of venerated great writers, harbingers of a certain highly emotional tradition. This applied to the countries aspiring to independence but also to their oppressors. For instance, Russian schools in Russian-occupied Poland of the nineteenth century used the great Russian writers – Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev – as a mainstay in their program of Russification. In view of the role of written culture, we may observe the consequences of its triumph in the twentieth century. A hundred years ago national literatures were largely beyond the reach of the lower classes, while today every child learns about the luminaries of his or her country, and this adds considerably to the intensity of national feeling. There would be nothing incongruous in imagining an atomic submarine named *Dostoevsky* or an aircraft named *Pushkin*. In Poland a ship was named after a modern bard, the poet Galczynski. It is true that this is a ship of the merchant marine.

We may wonder at the chance of success of Basque, Flemish, or Catalan nationalism in Western Europe. These are belated arrivals, and they pay the price of being late in their rebellion against the written culture of French or Spanish. One at least potential national movement has no chance whatever, and that is the attempt to recreate Occitania; namely, the area of the Languedoc covering the entire south of present-day France. The population there until recently spoke Oc, which was considered a dialect by Frenchmen. The fact that it was the language of a sophisticated written culture in the Middle Ages didn't save it from disappearance, and the few intellectuals writing novels in it are not enough to restore its usage.

In our part of Europe we see some phenomena analogous to those of Western Europe, but on a larger scale. While the written culture in the Baltic languages benefits from the non-Slavic character of those languages, the situation is much less clear in the areas where millions speak a Slavic language at home – Belorussian or Ukrainian – as opposed to the predominantly Russian school and written Russian culture. In France, parents of Breton children do not want to send their children to school taught in Breton, though those schools are available. And they are motivated by obvious practical reasons. It is an open question whether

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the Russian policy of the stick and carrot in Belorussia and the Ukraine is more effective; namely, the suppression of schools in native tongues on one hand and, on the other, the advantages offered those who are trained in the dominant written culture.

As you see, I speak of nationalism without giving it in advance a pejorative meaning, even if it is often responsible for hatreds between various nationalities. It should be recognized as an important factor even though progressive thinkers – the socialists and so on of the last century – ascribed it to temporary circumstances and hoped that those circumstances would disappear in the course of history.

It is possible that we now stand before new mutations of national movements endowed with a nearly religious appeal, and in this connection, an arch-nationalist writer, Dostoevsky, may be quoted. For observers of the present Soviet Union his pronouncements may sound disquieting. I quote: "The object of every national movement, in every people, and at every period of its existence, is only the seeking for its god who must be its own god, and the faith in him as the only true one." Another quotation from *The Possessed*: "If a great people doesn't believe that it alone is fit and destined to raise up and save all the rest of its truth, it would at once sink into being ethnographical material and not a great people."

These are pronouncements of pure messianism, a current of thought that ascribes to a collective body the function of savior both of itself and of other nations. This transposition of the individual Messiah of the Bible to the collective is blasphemous; nevertheless, it was dear to Dostoevsky, who considered himself a Christian. We find a similar messianism, though opposed to that of the Russians, in Poland, a country that used to be called by its poets "the Christ of nations." Today such factors exist which may favor the rebirth of such dreams. The first of those factors, I would guess, is the atomization of societies under the impact both of technology and, as in the countries which passed through the Communist system, of something which we could call the withering of society and the strengthening of the all-embracing state. There was a search for some principles of cohesion, some bonds surviving the destruction of organic communities. The state ideology inculcated in schools provided at least an illusion of integration, even though in some countries as Poland the official Marxism was entering into a conflict with another set of values maintained by the Church and the family. With the erosion of the Marxist doctrine, a void was opened, and it calls for being filled with something. The Solidarity movement in Poland had had may components, but the nationalist component was undoubtedly very strong. Perhaps in some Western national movements, the Basque for instance, we could distinguish a somewhat similar search for new bonds in the mod-

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ernized state with its big industrial centers.

Some elements of messianism seem to be present in contemporary national aspirations, though they are perhaps modified and less drastic than in the past. In the nineteenth century Russian messianism was fed by opposition to the "decadent," horrible Western Europe, and in this respect we may see again several rebirths. In Poland it thrived on the opposition of the Catholic, chivalrous country, faithful to the principles of honor, to a barbaric Russian autocracy. Today we can distinguish certain lines of continuation especially as the powerful Church in Poland distinguishes it from its atheistic neighbor to the east. It is not certain whether the idea of Central Europe, invented by a few intellectuals, has not slightly messianic connotations as it opposes "the greatest possible diversity on the smallest territory" to the Russian monolith. On the other hand, it opposes a kind of intellectual intensity, a seriousness and vigor in the arts, to the Western European slackness and sterility. Here I can quote from my preface to my book *The Emperor of the Earth*, and by doing this I engage in an exercise of self-irony: "We are now like the Dalmatians in the collapsing Roman Empire. They cared when the others wouldn't give a damn." This is how a friend of mine from Poland spoke of the difference between the so-called Eastern and Western Europeans. He might have added that although we have been attracted to the great Western centers of learning and art for generations, our admiration has never been without reservation. Yet it is true that something new has taken place in the last decades. Changed into outsiders by the political division of Europe, we began to see more clearly than before that which Western man, submerged by everyday life, has been reluctant to admit, and the spectacle before our eyes didn't seem very promising. In defense of the feeling of a sad superiority expressed in this fragment – and because it draws its strength from misfortune and political slavery – what can be invoked? Probably no more than the fact that the idea of our part of Europe as a separate entity is not limited to that of one nation but embraces several nations united by a common fate and perhaps maturing to friendly neighbor relations, which in the past was not their strong point.

People who haven't lived through the first decade after World War Two have difficulty visualizing the triumphal élan of the Marxist creed then attracting the best minds in both parts of divided Europe. That era is receding into oblivion so fast that the question is being asked as to why so many intellectuals fell victim to self-imposed blindness at that time, while the more sensible question would be as to why some opposed that lure and for what reasons. Thinking of human emotional needs, we should also recognize the enormous pull of claims laid on the individual by the nation to which he or she belongs. I realized this when

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reading Simon Dubnov, a historian of Jews in Russia, who describes his conversion to Jewish nationalism at the end of the last century. Allow me to quote from him: "I myself have lost faith in personal immortality, yet history teaches me that there is collective immortality and that the Jewish people can be considered as relatively eternal, for its history coincides with the full span of world history. The study of the Jewish people's past, then, also encompasses me in something eternal. This historicism admitted me into the national collective, drawing me out of the circle of personal problems onto the broad highway of social problems, less profound but more timely. National sorrow became dearer to me than the sorrow of the world." Dubnov lost his religious faith, but paradoxically this prompted him to believe in collective immortality.

A faithfulness to one nation may be endowed with a religious aura, especially when the religious beliefs are weakened or eroded. When reflecting on contemporary literature in Poland, I have an uncanny feeling that in spite of the importance and the high caliber of the Roman Catholic Church in that country, there is something like an erosion of religious faith on a deeper level, much as is visible in the West and in neighboring Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I ask myself whether, in its shift to patriotism, Polish literature doesn't show symptoms of agnosticism or atheism. The central locus of the sacred is moving from the religious sphere to the political sphere of a nation fighting for its independence. Utter skepticism and an awareness of the relativity of values are combined in that literature with an attachment to one absolute: an unconditional loyalty to one's nation. By saying this I do not intend to maintain that mass participation in Church rites and in pilgrimages in Poland is basically a political phenomenon. Yet the sacred bears a double character of attachment: to the Christian faith and to parents, grandparents, and ancestors who lived and died in the same faith.

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The problem of religion in our part of Europe is closely connected with that of nationalism, and in fact, it is sometimes difficult to separate religion from intense national feelings. The issue is of great complexity, and when we treat it from a purely religious point of view, it shows some unsolvable puzzles. Of course, Christian churches are primarily concerned with the salvation of the individual human soul and, in view of that aim, establish a certain hierarchy of commitments. An individual lives in a family, a family belongs to a certain community, which by the fact of language is a national community. It often happens that a national bond protects certain values which otherwise wouldn't survive under the

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impact of the state. In such a case the churches must appear as allies of the people who defend their nationality against the oppressors. But the ties between the clergy and national movements are also of less principled nature. In some countries the clergymen of peasant origin were instrumental in bringing about a "national rebirth," acting in the name of the peoples' culture against the culture of the upper classes. This happened, for instance, in the Western Ukraine, where the Greco-Catholic Church contributed to the Ukranian national consciousness, and in Lithuania, where the first poets writing in Lithuanian issued from Roman Catholic seminaries. The practical identification of Roman Catholicism with Polishness occurred during the nineteenth century because Poland was partitioned by Orthodox Russia and Protestant Prussia. To be a Pole and a Roman Catholic then became synonymous. This particular marriage of the nation and the Church led to some dramatic situations in the interwar period, because the Church was used to seeing itself as a political force. It threw its influence on the scale by backing the rightist National Democratic Party and often acting against the socialists and numerous national minorities. Of course, the position of the local clergy changed considerably during the postwar decades; nevertheless, national aspirations find a protective area in Catholicism.

This collusion of religious and national feelings must worry some Catholics, for it is full of dangers. It is difficult to forget what happened in Catholic Croatia during the last war, when crimes of genocide were committed in the name of religion as the only distinctive mark separating the Croats from the Orthodox Serbs. But it is not necessary to keep in mind such blatant distortions of Christianity. Even if it takes Christian and humane forms, religiously oriented nationalism threatens to abolish a clear distinction between what is due God and what is due Caesar. Yet Caesar means not necessarily the rulers of the state; Caesar can also mean the society at large and a collective pressure. It seems to me that in today's Poland the danger is clearly realized by Catholic intellectuals and by at least a part of the clergy.

Let me end with a quotation from Isaiah Berlin:

> It seems to me that those who, however perceptive in other respects, ignore the explosive power generated by the combination of unhealed mental wounds, however caused, with the image of the nation as a society of the living, the dead, and those yet unborn (sinister as this could prove to be when driven to a point of pathological exasperation), display an insufficient grasp of social reality.

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Reality

You shall forget these things, toiling in the household,
You shall remember them, droning by the fire,
When age and forgetfulness sweeten memory
Only like a dream that had often been told
And often been changed in the telling. They will seem unreal.
Human kind cannot bear very much reality.

-T. S. Eliot, **Murder in the Cathedral**

There goes a fascist. Kill the fascist. Crash! Crash!
Also a communist. Kill the communist. Bash! Bash!
O reality! Holy mother!
For you killing spiders is as little a bother.

-K. I. Gaiczynski*

The sound of this word is hideous; it is a literal translation of the French *réalité*, interchangeable at times with the nature of things (*la réalité des choses*). French distinguishes between *la réalité* and *le réel*; Polish lacks this distinction but needs it. Reality. *Wirklichkeit*. Russian has both *deistvitel'nost'*, derived from the word for taking action, not from the word for thing (as in Polish: *rzecz* [thing], *rzeczywistosc* [reality]) ,and *realnost'*.

What does this word mean? Why does everyone pay homage to things? In common parlance this word refers to all things that act according to their own laws and in such a way that, if we should find ourselves on the track along which they are moving, we would be killed. For we are fragile beings, and an avalanche tumbling down from the mountains, a hurricane, bacteria, viruses, chemical changes in the cells of our bodies can destroy us. However, we have learned to resist the forces of nature, and although for a significant portion of mankind drought, floods, and soil erosion are still a danger, what is left to us from among the elemental disasters are mainly aging and such diseases as have not yet been conquered by science. The thing which is most threatening to us is another man, either because he is armed and we are unarmed or poorly armed, or because (and it's all the same in the end) he has the power to deny us money, that is, nourishment. The foundation of human society is

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*Quoted from memory; it probably comes from a prewar edition of *Solomon's Ball*. -C. M.

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still the death penalty, whether it be death from a bullet, or in prison, or from hunger, and humanitarian choruses will have no effect on this.

For us, then, reality is social above all; that is, it is such that people-things follow orders dictated to them by other people, who appear to be masters of their own and others' fates, but who in fact have been transformed into things by the so-called necessities of life. We have not made much progress in understanding how all of this dovetails, and the scientist who studies viruses or sends rockets to other planets may react to self-appointed specialists in the social sciences with a sense of well-founded superiority.

I started paying attention to this nature of things early on, convinced that a poet who refuses to recognize its weight is living in a fool's paradise. While trying to cope with it, I also managed to collect many experiences as early as the years 1930-39; that is, in a period that is virtually unknown today. Unfortunately, if a reader should wish to find out what that period was like in Poland and Europe, I would be unable to point to any sources, because neither literature nor history has achieved even a passably accurate picture. Social reality is distinguished by the fact that it is opaque, treacherous, that with its myriad guises it deludes everyone who is entangled in it. In those days, only a few years after World War One, there were additional reasons for befuddlement, as happens when a man has received a powerful blow to the head. Although people talked a lot of nonsense, they seemed to be doing so in order to avoid thinking about what reality signified. When I was a student, I got to know a modest clerk from Poznan who was utterly absorbed in the by no means so distant past. For he had fought at Verdun as a soldier in the German infantry and had written a book about this for which he was vainly seeking a publisher. I read the typed manuscript. This report of a sojourn in the fifth or sixth circle of hell was probably more detailed and thus more horrifying than Remarque's widely acclaimed novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The older members of my family had in their past the years of war spent in the tsarist army, and even my beautiful cousin Ela, whose portrait, painted by Janowski, is one of the loveliest examples of Polish painting from around 1914, was a *sestritsa* [a Russian military nurse] at the time. For a vast number of the inhabitants of our country reality still meant tsarist Russia or Habsburg Galicia, and above all the World War and the 1920 campaign – perhaps even more than independent Poland itself. How well was it understood that the year 1914 was the manifestation of all of Europe's defects and of her end, that the longed-for war of nations had brought Poland to life as a posthumous creation? Pride in "one's own rubbish heap regained" counseled putting on a face that suggested nothing was wrong, but various subterranean currents

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were at work undermining the supports of official thinking. And just when virtually every grown man was struggling with some Verdun of his own, there came a new blow to the head: the 1929 crash on the New York Stock Exchange, mass unemployment, and Hitlerism, orchestrated by the German combatants of World War One. Soon afterward, a poet who had been one of Pilsudski's Legionnaires of 1914 wrote, "Mother, hand me my boots,/ The ones from twenty years ago." The boots may not have had time to grow old, but the "acceleration of history" has changed the world around Poland a little bit.

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When someone assures us after many years that he had a clear awareness of standing "face to face with the end," we should not believe him, because almost no one had such a clear awareness. Among writers, perhaps only Zdziechowski and Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz did. As one of the creators of "Catastrophism" I could, in fact, present written evidence on my own behalf, but it would be evidence only of an intuitive, poetic recognition.

Let me briefly explain where catastrophism came from. First, a rather general background, not just the Polish one. The social reality of the nineteenth century weighed upon people in literature and art, so they considered protesting against it the chief aim of their activity, although they reached out for various solutions. However, even the most abstract aesthetic theories had as their foundation a rebellion against the swirling vortex of the oppressors and the oppressed; the artist, as the only free man, had to be set against this vortex. By taking refuge in bohemian circles from the morality of the hated bourgeoisie and concluding numerous alliances with social dreamers, the writer or the artist bore witness to his heritage: the centuries-long yearning for the Second Coming. Secularization was proceeding apace, however, and if Jesus was still the central figure in utopian socialism, this Jesus figured only as an ethical ideal and a reformer. Soon it would be openly announced that Man-God and not God-Man would restore fallen nature.

In my mind, contrary to what I know about frivolous Paris in *La Belle Epoque,* the beginning of my century has a gloomy color and a shape that is, if I may say so, Russo-Anglo-Saxon. The year 1905. The Russian "stormy petrels." The American writers of the class struggle: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1907). And considering what I know about New York I do not think that the picture Gorky painted in *The City of the Yellow Devil* (1906) was an exaggeration. Furthermore, a gloomy reality does not appear only in revolutionary writers. It is also present in Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1902), the novel that Thomas Mann called the beginning of

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twentieth-century literature, and in *The Secret Agent* (1907). What symbolic titles! Let us recite them: the jungle, the iron heel, the city of the yellow devil, the heart of darkness, the secret agent. Since such grim forces as were described therein had led to the slaughter of the First World War, one can hardly be surprised that writers from various Western countries, raised on legends that remained in the wake of the American Revolution and the French Revolution, enthusiastically welcomed the Russian Revolution as the (final?) destruction of the Bastille.

Regardless of its specific circumstances as a country that had gained and defended its independence, Poland belonged to a system of linked vessels; for example, the left-wing wave in America and Germany was swelling in Poland precisely during the years from 1930 to 1933. I shall leave aside the question of so-called convictions, because they are not the issue here, although among the literati only a very few had any "convictions." A more important issue is their grasp of reality. I was filled with distaste during the rather short time that I produced social poetry, because it is obvious that in these various collective movements, whose participants beat the drum for each other, the poet betrays himself, out of pride, out of a need for recognition. They will walk right past a good poem and not notice it, but give them a "theme" and they'll respond immediately with shouts and bravos. Already at that time a riddle had appeared that became more and more painful the further along we moved into the twentieth century. If man is dehumanized and diminished by social reality, is not his diminution confirmed by taking him only and solely as a small part of that social reality? Whence the dullness of all those works about "wrongs" that are, after all, so noble in their intent? Many clamorous poems and not a few pages of comparable prose were written in Poland and elsewhere at that time, but none of this appears to have lasted. "Catastrophism" was an attempt at restoring measure. A literary argument, the catastrophist poets' opposition to such literary schools as Skamander or the Avant Garde, explains less in this context than their renunciation of "social poetry"; their accusations, which were never formulated as a theory, would have sounded like this: You are preoccupied with reality but it is completely unreal, for you keep on about your provincial world while everything is happening on a planetary scale, the Apocalypse is imminent, and while you strive to reduce man to *homo economicus*, there is a hidden content in the historical Apocalypse that we cannot comprehend. Perhaps a poem such as Jerzy Zagórski's "Ode on the Fall of the Pound" still belonged to social poetry, but there was more to it than just a prediction of the collapse of the British Empire. The same poet's "The Coming of the Enemy" is a surrealistic fairy tale about the advent of the Antichrist; the action takes

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place on the plains of Eurasia, near the Arctic Ocean, and in the Caucasus.

After 1939, the young poets of underground Warsaw could not remain indifferent to such accurate forebodings by their predecessors. Nevertheless, prewar catastrophism was a threat to these young people, because it was international in its intellectual references, and they wanted to enclose themselves in the national dimension whatever the cost. Similarly, when they encountered another catastrophism, Witkacy's, what they borrowed from him was chiefly his grotesque, from his plays, whereas we, judging by my own response at least, were influenced primarily by the historiosophical premises of his novels. We were not, however, as pessimistic as the desperately clowning and suicidally earnest Witkacy. Who knows if a totally pessimistic poetry is even possible or, if poetry is to be at all valuable, whether it does not always have to be hopeful? In the poetry of the Catastrophists, every so often a note of irony toward the fate that befell them can be heard, but there is also a yearning for harmony, for beauty, which ought to be the lot of a saved man.

And what about today, when those dire prophecies and their fulfillment (or, rather, partial fulfillment) are in the past? Our planetary reality has split in two into the so-called West and the so-called East, and I have drunk from both the one and the other poisoned well. I have also become convinced that the puzzle of the thirties still cries out for a solution.

Did the nineteenth century lie when it dreamed its dream of itself? That can't be ruled out. But at least its great metropolis, in which Macbeth's witches stirred their brew, speaks to us from the pages of Balzac, Dickens, Dostoevsky; it is the stage for a human comedy like the *cité infernale* of Baudelaire's poems; it looks at us with the faces of the corrupt judges and venal journalists of Daumier's prints, and with the face of the prostitute from Manet's *Olympia*. There was something then that could be called the will of realism. That will was still in evidence at the beginning of our century, but not for long. Its disappearance from literature and art is more or less contemporaneous with the widespread dissemination of the newsreel and the documentary, which is why people have sought to lay the blame for this on emulation of these new, vicarious means of expression. But the true causes probably lie much deeper. Man is either a *supported* being, or he dissolves into mist, into a mirage. For the nineteenth century the impetus given by Christianity still sufficed to support man; that is, to understand individual fate as meaningful. The advocates of Man as the Masses, industriously patching together their social literature during the thirties, fooled themselves into believing that Nietzsche's laughter had nothing to do with them. For no matter what

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our anger may be like and no matter how strong our sympathy for the fate of the oppressed, we will have a difficult time achieving that minimum of attention without which literature is only paper if we remain convinced that man, whom we are concerned about, is interchangeable, is but a bubble on the current of "processes." It is not for nothing that dread of the future rules the work of Dostoevsky, the second prophet of "nihilism." Dostoevsky was not a psychologist; he was, as he has rightly been called, a pneumatologist, and there is a great difference between the two. *Pneuma*, the spirit, is not the same as that instrument for inscribing impressions that once was called the soul, and the struggle for the salvation of *homo pneumatikos*, despite the temptations of *homo psychikos*, is worth the highest stakes. Dostoevsky considered himself an authentic realist, and he was one, he could still be one, and that is the reason why.

Having lived for a long time in France and in America, I have been astounded by my observation that the tough and predatory reality that surrounds me *does not exist* in the literature of these countries. Not that it would be worthwhile to offer some formulas, because they would turn out to be impossible. Many a formula has been applied by writers who swear that they will faithfully describe only what has truly taken place, will stick to the "facts," and every time the result was, at best, naturalism. But naturalism is total unreality – in disguise. Bundles of reflexes torment bundles of reflexes, bundles of reflexes copulate with bundles of reflexes, bundles of reflexes murder bundles of reflexes. A world not of people but of flies. And if man is only a fly, then why be so upset about his unhappiness? Only a hero, in whose existence both the author and the reader believe, can be a measure of reality. Such nineteenth-century heroes as Rastignac, Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, Fabrizcio del Dongo from *The Charterhouse of Parma* still exist to this day. The heroes that Western authors have managed to create in the last few decades are striking. The preeminent hero is, without a doubt, the youthful comic-book detective Tintin; far behind him comes another detective, a grown man, Simenon's Maigret. That's the situation in the Francophone countries. On the other hand, in the English-speaking countries, only one character seems to have truly captivated readers. It is Frodo Baggins, the hero of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, a rich allegorical novel about the struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, similar, in fact, in its narrative strategy, to Sienkiewicz's trilogy. Only, the young Frodo is not even a human child; he is a fantastic creation, a hobbit, an elf, the Englishman's daydream of himself, who lives in snug dens, drinks tea in the afternoon, and is capable of heroic deeds – but only if they are absolutely necessary.

Reality, if it is to be captured, demands a hero, but it also demands

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an organizing idea. This idea does not have to reside within the writer's head, because his epoch's air permeates him. The nineteenth century still lived with the great hope of the rebirth of man. It was no accident that I referred to utopian socialism, whose significance was enormous. Today's ideas of social justice promise everything that anyone might want, but not that the oppressed will be liberated from the power of people-things; they are therefore insufficiently exciting and their semi-paralysis turns descriptions sour while they are still in embryonic form, since they are inseparable from a sense of direction, of striving. An unseen law of phenomena turns out to be more powerful here than the wishes of numerous Western adherents of revolution, whose sense of reality appears to be on the wane, since they are unable to gain even as much recognition as their predecessors in the thirties:

> There is in all these works a certain atmosphere of universal doom; especially in *Ulysses*, with its mocking *odi-et-amo* hodgepodge of the European tradition, with its blatant and painful cynicism, and its uninterpretable symbolism – for even the most painstaking analysis can hardly emerge with anything more than an appreciation of the multiple enmeshment of the motifs but with nothing of the purpose and meaning of the work itself. And most of the other novels which employ multiple reflections of consciousness also leave the reader with an impression of hopelessness. There is often something confusing, something hazy about them, something hostile to the reality which they represent. We not infrequently find a turning away from the practical will to live, or delight in portraying it under its most brutal forms. There is hatred of culture and civilization, brought out by means of subtle stylistic devices which culture and civilization have developed, and often a radical and fanatical urge to destroy. Common to almost all of these novels is haziness, vague indefinability of meaning: precisely the kind of uninterpretable symbolism which is also to be encountered in other forms of art of the same period.
>
> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* [translated by Willard R. Trask]

Auerbach's book about mimesis or the reflection of reality in European literature, beginning with the Greeks, was written in 1942-45 in Istanbul, where the author, an émigré from Germany, happened to be living. His above-quoted observations refer to the years before World War Two. Since they are just as apt a characterization of postwar literature up until the present (except that the features he noticed have become even more obvious), we should not take his judgments lightly, nor those of writers like him when they place the twentieth century under the sign of a destructive movement that demonstrates its own continuity.

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We are born only once on this earth, and only one and no other historical time is given to us. If we recognize that it is our lot to live in a decadent era, we are faced with the problem of choosing our tactics. Since man is not an animal and is in touch with the entire past of his species, and since the past, to the extent that forgotten civilizations are being rediscovered, is becoming even more accessible, we cannot but be depressed by the thought that instead of trying to equal the greatest human achievements, we yield to inferior philosophies only because they are contemporary. It is very difficult to find appropriate tactics for resistance, and our development, if it is to be worthy of that name, must be founded, I believe, on advancing from unconscious tactics to conscious tactics. Unfortunately, the individual, because he absorbs the same things as everyone around him, is weak and is continually considering whether it is not he who is mistaken.

It would be an exaggeration to insist that man can change radically. The germ of energy which is his alone – let's call it predestination – will remain the same in evil and in good, in truth and in error; he also has certain set limits, his own ability to interpret things properly. The fundamental constructs in his life are repetitive, but they can assume a new shape. I did not stop being a "catastrophist" after the Second World War, in the sense that losing one's sense of reality still seems to me deserving of punishment. But I have chosen my guides more and more consciously, and not from among the representatives of contemporary belles lettres, which are infected with the loss of a sense of reality. I also consciously kept apart from that plaintive whimpering that is practically synonymous with the written word these days. Having crossed a certain boundary, inside which, unfortunately, the nature of things is our mistress, one begins to treat such whimpering and also the entire theater of the absurd, along with the attempts at traditional "realism" that are doomed to failure – as belonging to the past. A pessimistic appraisal of the powerlessness of contemporary forces, and of the literature and art that unconsciously submit to these forces, is not synonymous with a lack of faith in individual achievements or with doubts about an eventual victory of the human race over "reality." After all, consciousness, in the clutches of the epoch, is always incomplete, and as it grows older we shall at best be able to describe clearly what it is that we do not want. And that is how it ought to be, for our zealousness has its source in our nay-saying to what the age obligingly places before us.

*

"What is truth?" asked Pilate. "What is reality?" people ask. Such a question one should refuse to answer.

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ALFRED KAZIN

Howards End Revisited

Howards End appeared in 1910, a date that explains an idealism important to our understanding of the book. It was E. M. Forster's fourth novel. He had written in rapid succession *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), *The Longest Journey* (1907), and *A Room with a View* (1908). *Howards End* was the last novel he was to publish for fourteen years. The next, *A Passage to India* (1924), was certainly worth waiting for, but it is not as serene and hopeful as *Howards End*. The "Great War," the most influential event of the twentieth century and the onset of all our political woe, had intervened between Forster's two major novels and certainly darkened the second. The reality of British imperialism, bringing the threat of racial politics to Forster's belief in personal relationships as the supreme good, was something unsuspected in *Howards End*.

In 1910 Forster was thirty-one. In the next sixty years he was to publish only one novel more. *Maurice*, a novel about homosexual love that had been circulating privately for years, was published soon after Forster's death in 1970. All these dates and gaps in Forster's record as a novelist have their significance. He was a wonderfully supple and intelligent writer for whom the outside world was a hindrance and even a threat to his identification of himself and his art with "relationships." Everyone knows that he wrote in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, "I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country." But what – as happened so often in World War Two – if my friend betrayed *me* for an ideology he considered his only "country"?

So the date of *Howards End* has a certain poignancy now. The most famous idea in it is "Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die." No one with the slightest sense of twentieth-century history can read that in the 1990s without thinking (not for the first time) how far we have traveled, in liberal, generous, above all religious instinct, from 1910. *Howards End* is a shapely and beautiful novel, ex-

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tremely well thought out. One has to read it now as a fable about England at the highest point of its hopes in 1910, while at its center rises up before us, as always, England's eternal Chinese wall of class distinctions, class war, class hatred – a world in which people stink in each other's nostrils because of their social origins or pretensions: in which a poor young man, who has lost his job and is in the depths of despair because of his home life, encounters hostility because he walks down Regent Street without a hat. But *Howards End* resolves this war between the English, tries to lift away this winding-sheet of snobberies and taboos, in the only way it has ever been resolved – in a beautiful theory of love between persons. This extends just as far as love ever extends. Meanwhile social rage keeps howling outside the bedroom.

Howards End is a novel of ideas, not brute facts; in many respects it is an old kind of novel, playful in the eighteenth-century sense, full of tenderness toward favorite characters in the Dickens style, inventive in every structural touch but not a modernist work. A modernist work - *Ulysses* will always be the grand, cold monument – is one that supplants and subsumes the subject entirely in favor of the author as performer and total original. This is hardly the case in *Howards End*. Forster cares; he cares so much about the state of England and the possibility of deliverance that what occupies him most in working out the book is a dream of a strife-torn modern England returning to the myth of its ancient beginnings as a rural, self-dependent society. It is typical of an undefeatable tenderness (almost softness) in Forster's makeup that the book ends in a vision of perfect peace right at the old house in Hertfordshire, Howards End, that is the great symbol throughout the book of stability in ancestral, unconscious wisdom. Even in 1910 this was absurd – hardly an answer to the class war. But fairy tales thrive on being of another world.

The class war is hardly an English prerogative, but the English have been so good at picturing it that it is no wonder they cannot do without it. Where but in England would that quirky refugee Karl Marx have found so perfect a ground, a text, for his belief in the long-established war between the classes? As I write, I notice in a review by Sir Frank Kermode of Sir V. S. Pritchett's *Collected Stories*, that Pritchett once had a conversation with H. G. Wells "in which they considered the question of whether lower-class characters could ever be treated in other than comic terms." It is noteworthy that Kermode finds it entirely natural to write of "lower-class characters" and "suburban little people." These are phrases that seem comic to an American – not because America is less divided than England but because, torn apart as it is by race, fear, and hatred, its gods are equality and social mobility.

How different the case in England. Dickens, though he lent pathos

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and occasionally even dignity (if not heroism) to his lower-class characters, certainly delighted in "treating" them in comic terms just as much as Shakespeare did. It is hard to think of any first-class English novelist before Thomas Hardy who identifies so much with the "lowly" and who gave characters at the bottom like Jude and Tess so much love and respect.

George Orwell in 1937: "Whichever way you turn, this curse of class differences confronts you like a wall of stone. Or rather it is not so much like a wall of stone as the plate glass pane of an aquarium." This American was for some months near the end of World War II in close contact with "other ranks" in the British army. Even when lecturing at Cambridge after the war, he came to see how the college servants lived, as well as the incomparable beauty of the public surface. These experiences gave glimpses of a side of life in England that explained the rancor and frustration of postwar English writing - but also its violent humor. As Edmund Wilson said, the English Revolution was made in America.

I hasten to add – and *Howards End* is in many respects specifically about England – that as a subject single and entire of itself, blissful to the literary imagination, England –

> This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea

awakens an honest glow in its writers. America is too vast, heterogeneous, and spiritually mixed up to appear before its writers as a believable single image. F. Scott Fitzgerald in his notebooks: "France was a land, England was a people, but America, having about it still that quality of the idea, was harder to utter – it was the graves at Shiloh and the tired, drawn, nervous faces of its great men, and the country boys dying in the Argonne for a phrase that was empty before their bodies withered. It was a willingness of the heart."

America certainly has been harder to utter – except in the most grandiose and boastful terms. By contrast, here is Forster in Chapter Nineteen of *Howards End*. The Schlegel sisters' German cousin is with them on a tour of the countryside, and because one of the signal points of this novel is that the characters are all representative – the English of conflicting attitudes and cultures, the Germans of different sides of Ger-

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many - Forster here "interrupts" himself to speak with felt emotion about England, his England, everyone's England, summed up as "our island":

> If one wanted to show a foreigner England, perhaps the wisest course would be to take him to the final section of the Purbeck Hills, and stand him on their summit, a few miles to the east of Corfe. Then system after system of our island would roll together under his feet. . . . How many villages appear in this view! How many castles! How many churches, vanished or triumphant! How many ships, railways, and roads! What incredible variety of men working beneath that lucent sky to what final end! The reason fails, like a wave on the Swanage beach; the imagination swells, spreads, and deepens, until it becomes geographic and encircles England.

A few pages on, he inserts into a scene of conflict between the Schlegel sisters on the incredible thought (to Helen) that Margaret could even *consider* marrying the overbearing businessman Henry Wilcox:

> England was alive, throbbing through all her estuaries, crying for joy through the mouths of her gulls, and the north wind, with contrary emotion, blew stronger against her rising seas. What did it mean? For what end are her fair complexities, her changes of soil, her sinuous coast? Does she belong to those who have moulded her and made her feared by other lands, or those who had added nothing to her power, but have somehow seen her, seen the whole island at once, lying as a jewel in a silver sea, sailing in a ship of souls, with all the brave world's fleet accompanying her towards eternity?

Earlier, Forster had written of "our race," and later he was to write of his countrymen and women as "comrades." So the attentive reader comes to see that behind the rivalry and final, ironic conjunction of Schlegels and Wilcoxes (meaning Margaret and her defeated husband Henry Wilcox) is Forster's yearning hope (as of 1910) that this grievously class-proud, class-protecting, class-embittered society may yet come to think of some deeper, more ancient "comradeship" as one of its distinguishing marks. Where Forster's belief in "personal relationships" was founded on Bloomsbury and the *Principia Ethica* (1903) of its Cambridge sage G. E. Moore, Forster's invocation of "comradeship" no doubt owes much to Edward Carpenter, a strong defender of homosexuality who was one of the first English disciples of Walt Whitman.

But "comradeship" aside for the moment, English literature's advan-

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tage over American literature, so it appeared to the American critic who helped to make Forster famous in America, Lionel Trilling, is that the class war, class distinctions of every kind, social rivalries of the most minute (and even nastiest) kind, are great for literature. As conflict seems to be the first rule in life, so conflict taken seriously enough, without sentimental hopes of easy deliverance, is comedy, is tragedy, is dialogue, is history, is FORCE. Only an Englishman would have opened Chapter Six of *Howards End* with:

> We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet. This story deals with gentlefolk, or with those who are obliged to pretend that they are gentlefolk.
>
> The boy, Leonard Bast, stood at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it.

This would have enraged the California novelist and pioneer socialist, Jack London, who in 1902 went down into the "horror" of London's poor to write *The People of the Abyss*, a powerful document not likely to interest anyone in England but the Salvation Army. Because *Howards End* is rooted not even in Fabian socialism but in the dream of "personal relationships," one of the felt tensions in the book is the fear of war between England and Germany. The Schlegels' father (now dead) was a German idealist who fought for Prussia before it took Germany over, and in disgust left for England and married an Englishwoman. Even the famous German literary name of "Schlegel," connected with August Wilhelm von Schlegel's translation of Shakespeare, is representative. Margaret and Helen Schlegel are relative outsiders in English society not only because they are "not really English," but because they have been dangerously infected by some old idealism from the Germany of poets and philosophers.

★

So much for the background of *Howards End* and what we may fairly take to be Forster's ruling concerns. One must be careful not to make the book more solemn in tone than it actually is. It begins with one of the most informal and delightful openings in modern fiction, a thoroughly unexpected way of proceeding that shows just how far 1910 has departed from Victorian heaviness. (The Queen had died just nine years before.) "One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister." This is so Forsterian – easy in its approach, altogether unpretentious, of course wily – that it is not until one goes back over the book, with the house, Howards End, staying in mind as the embodiment of Forster's image of a

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traditional and supposedly "safe" England, that one realizes how altogether clever the opening is.

Helen Schlegel's first excited letter from Howards End, occupied by the bustling, proprietary Wilcoxes, who do not understand all it means to its original and true owner, their wife and mother Mrs. Wilcox, nevertheless firmly posits the house as the thematic center of the book. The house alone – with Mrs. Wilcox as its frail but presiding spirit – is England. The sisters are, at the beginning, as far from the soul of the house as the Wilcoxes are. But a story has to begin somewhere, anywhere, so this story begins with Helen's innocent rapture at getting away to the country from Wickham Place in London. What is oldest and most meaningful about the house's significant surroundings – the great wych-tree and the pig's teeth long ago driven into its trunk – are to Helen only unusual and charming. Yet one day, amazingly enough, this house will become the home of Margaret and Helen and Helen's son by the unfortunate Leonard Bast, dead at the hand of Charles Wilcox hammering him with the flat of a sword that is itself a memorial of "old" England.

The opening is a fairy tale, in all naiveté and innocence, because of Helen's premature joy in the house and her crush on Paul Wilcox, the younger brother. The resolution of the book will be another fairy tale, all too set up and thinly prophetic, about the final, strange, tragically enforced occupation of Howards End by the sisters, Helen's son, and Margaret's husband Henry Wilcox, crushed by his son's imprisonment for manslaughter.

Between the brief, illusionary idyll of the opening and the *willed* idyll of the end (a problem for any reader who knows how little England lived up to the rosiness of the book's conclusion) we get the delicious social comedy of the first conflict between the Wilcoxes and the Schlegels. They met as tourists in the Rhineland, looking at – or was it looking for? – medieval castles. An invitation to Howards End ensued. We are now to see acted out "the rift in the lute," as one English historian described the many distinctions that make one English person so routinely despise another. For all the idealism among some of the educated in 1910, the distinctions were bright and distinct (sometimes as lethal) as ever. It is true that 1910 – to judge by the sunny moral atmosphere that prevails in *Howards End* – was a period of hope. Forster, like all his Cambridge friends, had indeed taken to heart the precious words from G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica*:"By far the most valuable things . . . are . . . the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects; it is they . . . that form the rational, ultimate end of social progress." All this allowed Forster to weave possibilities around his famous injunction – "Only connect!" Fourteen years later, after the most

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terrible slaughter of Englishmen in a single day at the Somme, Forster evidently found it harder to say of his English and Hindu protagonists in *A Passage to India*, "Only connect!" His beloved India itself stood in the way.

There is even a half-spoken religious touch to *Howards End*, characteristic of this very conscientious writer descended from members of the nineteenth-century Evangelical Clapham Sect. Early in the book Margaret Schlegel says of the already ominous English-German rivalry, "Her conclusion was that any human being lies nearer the unseen than any organization, and from this she never varied." Mrs. Wilcox haunts the book because her sense of tradition is involuntary and subliminal, involved with the "unseen." She represents spiritual qualities not evident to the chattering sophisticates Margaret uselessly tries to involve at a luncheon party.

The comedy so rich in *Howards End* begins with the Schlegels' intrusive Aunt Juley taking it on herself to go down to Howards End when word comes from impulsive Helen that she and Paul are in love. "Love" in 1910 means engagement, engagement marriage, marriage the entwining of families perhaps not meant to be entwined. Aunt Juley may be a fool, but she is a proper Englishwoman who knows how serious are the implications jutting out of the juvenile words, "Paul and I are in love – the younger son who only came here Wednesday." We have the house, Howards End, described from the outside by Helen soon after her visit. And now we have Aunt Juley's confrontation with the older brother, Charles Wilcox, as they come on each other at the railway station.

Barriers everywhere. Charles Wilcox is totally peremptory, Aunt Juley more than slightly befuddled. She can barely make clear her concern about her niece, and Charles, who has had some initial difficulty grasping the fact that his very own brother Paul is involved, is insufferable in his superiority. We are in the comedy country of English folk viscerally unable to tolerate each other on sight. Aren't Charles and Aunt Juley both gentlefolk? Even in her first illusory enchantment with Howards End, Helen had admitted to Margaret, "We live like fighting cocks." "Mr. Wilcox says the most horrid things about women's suffrage so nicely, and when I said I believed in equality he just folded his arms and gave me such a setting down as I've never had."

There is no different of opinion between Charles and Aunt Juley. Both are against any possible engagement between Helen and Paul. The issue between them is that they are prepared to mistrust and misunderstand each other. The world of "distinctions" is made ever more graphic by Charles Wilcox's exasperation with the old station porter for not

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fetching a package to him immediately he calls for it. In his unbridled *hauteur* he cannot take it in that Aunt Juley even thinks him Paul. And Charles is too proprietary about his "motor" even when there is no way of getting rid of Juley besides inviting her to get into it. This Wilcox "motor" is quite a presence in the book. No motor, no status. No status, no Wilcoxes. Schlegels (at least in 1910) cannot possibly have a motor. Henry and Aunt Juley exchange insults by " 'Capping Families,' a round of which is always played when love would unite two members of our race. But they played it with unusual vigour, stating in so many words that Schlegels were better than Wilcoxes, Wilcoxes better than Schlegels. They flung decency aside." Earlier, we have had a hint that love between Paul and Helen is easily thwarted. Helen writes to Margaret that Paul "is mad with terror in case I said the wrong thing." But now, as Henry and Aunt Juley descend from the motor at Howards End in unseemly anger, a voice from the garden reproves, calms, and because of who she is, blesses. It is Mrs. Wilcox.

Mrs. Wilcox, who dies early in the book, leaving her spirit to descend upon her family without their quite knowing or using it, is the representative character in the book who is deepest and speaks the least. Her spirit, already so rooted in Howards End, becomes essential to Margaret, who tries to understand her mysterious authority and perhaps never does so fully even when *she* becomes Henry Wilcox's wife and comes to occupy Howards End. As has often been noted, E. M. Forster "had a thing about old ladies." It is extraordinary how Mrs. Wilcox comes to dominate the book. She is far more impressive than the easily befuddled Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India*. She embodies natural inheritance, not the solicited kind, and certainly not the frantic striving for property and position so central to her husband and children. Over whom she has not the slightest influence! Who and what is she that she is so important to Forster? She is what does not need to be explained and totally cannot be – the transmission of spirit, not of biological life. The ancientness of the wych elm and the folklore embodied in the pig's teeth driven into the tree (it was long believed that a piece of the bark would cure toothache) represent the agelessness of a simple truth that cannot be put into words. One can only live it, so very briefly, as Mrs. Wilcox dies in her fifties, and with the fragility of the dying pass it on, sibyl-like, as in a shadowy note from the hospital in which she indicates that "Margaret Schlegel is to have Howards End."

The great thing about Mrs. Wilcox is that she does not know all she knows. She is above or below the fever and the fret of modern English life, which is typified by a lasting insecurity about where to live next. When Margaret and Helen have to move from Wickham Place in Lon-

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don (they never find another London flat, since Howards End is their destiny), Mrs. Wilcox is horrified. "To be parted from your house, your father's house – it oughtn't to be allowed. It is worse than dying. I would rather die than – Oh, poor girls! Can what they call civilization be right if people mayn't die in the room where they were born?"

Forster allows us to infer that Mrs. Wilcox is not unwilling to die in a world fundamentally unintelligible to her. I should add that her virtue consists in her seeming insignificant to her own family. Leaving Howards End to Margaret, a comparative stranger, proves to the Wilcoxes how very odd their mother was. And of course they even suspect Margaret of conniving at the suspect and baffling bequest. But does Mrs. Wilcox's strange wish mean that the "inheritance" of the house – by implication, England – is now safe in the hands of "intellectuals" like the Schlegels, whose most noteworthy characteristic, not always honored in the novel, is their ample supply of abstract good will? This is the optimism of 1910, this is perhaps even Bloomsbury (Forster was not central to it), with its cardinal optimism that persons may yet be stronger than institutions. Still, Forster's fairy tale rests on Margaret, Helen, and Helen's baby by Leonard Bast occupying Howards End at the last. This is certainly an ideal ending of sorts. But isn't Forster too shrewd to allow the reader to take this as anything more than a dream of peace?

And there is this problem with Mrs. Wilcox. Her dying so early in the book, though crucial to the plot, may also be taken as the weakness of such wonderful "old" ladies, like the befuddlement of Mrs. Moore at the caves of Marabar in *A Passage to India* that results in so much trouble for innocent Dr. Aziz and poisons him against the English. "Mrs. Wilcox has left few indications behind her," Forster writes with double-edged irony about a woman deep without being clever. Can it be that Mrs. Wilcox is in her total self-containment without intellect of the pushing, urban, altogether modern kind? To Mrs. Wilcox alone is it not necessary or urgent to say, "Only connect!"? She *is* connection, of the most wonderful silent kind. Typical of Forster, in a passing aside, to tell us that Mrs. Wilcox is a Quaker, while Henry Wilcox and his family, originally Dissenters, are now safe and proper in the Church of England. Mrs. Wilcox is important because she is Other. Far, far from Howards End and its tutelary mistress are the social rivalries and distinctions and snobberies that dispossess fellow human beings. Which is why the poor, easily floored clerk Leonard Bast is in all his cultural confusions and social strivings so important to the book.

Leonard is not a character E. M. Forster knows by heart, as he does Margaret, Helen, and even their laid-back little brother Tibby. Nor is he a character like Henry Wilcox whom Forster knows from the hard social evidence around him. The rising Henry Wilcoxes were – now are – ev-

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erywhere. Poor little Leonard at the bottom of the lower – lowest! – middle class is a mere clerk, the kind Bloomsbury knew only across a very wide gulf. Virginia Woolf, on *Ulysses*, in her diary for 1922, saw it all as:

> a queasy undergraduate scratching his pimples . . . An illiterate, underbred book it seems to me, the book of a self-taught workingman, & we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking & ultimately nauseating. When one can have cooked flesh, why have the raw?

And then there was John Maynard Keynes writing to Duncan Grant some years earlier, "I must go to tea now to meet some bloody working men who will be I expect as ugly as men can be." But Leonard Bast is not even a working man. Bloomsbury could not have imagined a working man, since such did not - certainly not in 1910 – listen to Beethoven's Fifth at the Queen's Hall or try to follow Ruskin's verbal ecstasies over architecture in *The Stones of Venice*. Leonard was imaginable to Forster because he was "an illiterate, underbred" striver after CULTURE, and Forster and friends certainly had a lot of that. When Forster said in his splendid book, *Aspects of the Novel*, that a character is real to the reader when the novelist knows all about the character, he was perhaps congratulating himself for knowing Leonard up and down as a social type – the hanger-on where he does not belong, the ultimate in pathos and powerlessness. Why so much of both? Why so *much* wretchedness without respite to Leonard Bast? Because of his being neither bourgeois nor working man but a clerk in an insurance company looking to better himself. A snob without justification, always looking up the backsides of those he finds it natural to idealize, he is the type a mandarin of culture finds unbearable. He is the type the English most easily sacrifice and dismiss. Leonard has no party and no friends or associates. He is uneasy with his live-in "companion," Jacky, who is lower-class all right but somehow contemptible because she lives with the likes of *him*.

Let us face it: Leonard Bast does not know his place, and that is far worse than having *some* place, even at the bottom. Meeting Margaret Schlegel at the concert hall where Beethoven's Fifth will manifest "panic and emptiness" in its growling ups and downs and finally wonderful resurgence of the human spirit over its private terror, Leonard becomes a bother from the very first because of his social unsuredness. "She wished that he was not so anxious to hand a lady downstairs, or to carry a lady's programme for her – his class was near enough her own for its manners to vex her." Near enough her own? Remember that Leonard

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was early defined by Forster by class or near-class as standing "at the extreme verge of gentility. He was not in the abyss, but he could see it." Leonard is not so much created as *defined*. That is the advantage to a novelist of a class system. Leonard is the sort of hard-luck character the English happily accept in literature because one – isn't one? – is so easily resigned to such a fate, to the abyss. Leonard has no hope about anything. He was meant from all eternity to be squashed. Before long, thanks to the Schlegels transmitting Henry Wilcox's ill-founded belief in the instability of the Porphyrion Insurance Company, Leonard resigns his job, and soon he will have no other.

What is irking about Leonard is that he is all too easily defined. Nobody in the book, beginning with himself, believes in Leonard. Jacky's acquaintance with him is limited to the bedroom. Forster – like the academic critics who, discussing *Howards End*, also smirk over this – has his fun describing Leonard's ridiculous efforts to follow Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*. Culture is the only property some academics have, and as Plato said, property is the greatest passion. Still, nobody, even in a novel, can be so ignorantly pretentious without ceasing to exist. What saves Leonard for Forster is *a)* Leonard is a social specimen defined by his irritating all the other classes – remember the hostility he encounters when, in the greatest distress, he walks down Regent Street without a hat! – and *b)* he is the sacrificial victim all the others demand – even Helen, who bears his child – so that Forster can get on with his plot.

Forster's plot depends on Leonard being discardable. So, in the end, Leonard is the victim of Henry Wilcox's hypocritical self-righteousness (Jacky was once Henry's mistress) and of Charles Wilcox's ferocious sense of class superiority. It is nothing but his sense of rightful domination that leads him to knock down Leonard with the flat of the ancestral sword that has hung so long on the wall at Howards End. This induces Leonard to fall against the bookcases in such a way as to bring the books tumbling down all over him (a nice touch), and he dies of a heart attack! Poor poor Leonard! Yet such is the neatly calculated hierarchical structure at the essence of the novel that without Leonard's intrusion into Howards End and his dying there, Charles Wilcox would not be imprisoned for manslaughter, and his father would not collapse. This leaves Margaret and Helen and Helen's baby by Leonard (it was the supposed "seduction" of Helen by a lower-class type that so outraged the Wilcoxes) free to occupy Howards End. This answers the question said to be at the heart of the book – Who will inherit England? The Schlegels have triumphed over the Wilcoxes – why not say over all Wilcoxes? Which is lovely nonsense.

Forster was a clever plot-maker, and, not altogether surprisingly, very

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fond of getting things moving by way of a little violence now and then. There is a lot of plot in *Howards End* because there are a lot of class barriers to move past in a society that on the surface, at least, is constructed of barriers. If Leonard in his pursuit of cultural improvement had not gone to hear Beethoven at the Queen's Hall, Helen Schlegel would not have mistakenly gone off with his umbrella. Margaret therefore has to take him back to Wickham Place for the umbrella. Whereupon Margaret and Helen sort of take him up, a little out of pity, much out of the intellectual liberalism suitable to the freshening winds of 1910. When Leonard brokenly describes an ecstatic solitary walk at night, they are stirred, amused, not unmixed with curiosity about such a social specimen. Finally, when on Henry Wilcox's arrogant say-so, Leonard is encouraged by the sisters to give up his clerkship, he soon finds himself unemployable.

Better not to ask why Leonard then gives up in total despair. There is a formula to such things in the English novel, which contains no Huckleberry Finns "lighting out for the territory" when they are held in by civilization. The adjustment of accident to circumstance being everything in a novel so thoroughly plotted, it turns out that Jacky was carnally known to Henry Wilcox, which gives Margaret a moral advantage over Henry. Helen is so torn with pity for Leonard that she comes to bear his son, and this is necessary so that Leonard will die, almost ritually, by sword, making Leonard's son and *his* descendants the heirs of – "England"? Paul Wilcox, preparing to go back to Africa on imperial business, crudely refers to "piccaninnies." The word means "a Negro child – said to be offensive." So Leonard's class ignominy, transferred to the child's illegitimacy, has become one of race.

Paul Wilcox may rant as he likes, but the inheritance on which the book ends is romantic. And indeed there are many romantic and vaguely "mystical" touches to the book, in the form of apothegms or asides by Forster himself. "Only connect!" "Personal relations are the important thing for ever and ever, and not this outer life of telegrams and anger." "Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its highest." And this – almost Dostoyevskian – "Death destroys a man; the idea of death saves him."

The force behind these noble sentences is that they *are* noble and reminds us of a certain pre-1914 spirituality, even of the D. H. Lawrence in his Biblical and utopian phase who was when still in England so friendly to Forster and *Howards End* . But in what sense can "Only connect!" be taken as a solution to the war of the classes, the war of social distinctions, the war between good manners and manners that are merely observant of better manners?

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Important as the phrase was to Forster himself, it can be said that while this was an injunction he obeyed as a man and made the basis of his intimate life, he also distrusted it – it could become too special. Bloomsbury believed in "personal relations" because it consisted of friends and lovers. Forster may not have been a genius like Virginia Woolf. Her genius lay in her ability to give consistency to her hallucinatory sense of consciousness, her ability as a novelist to show us the actual rhythms through which the mind at its deepest levels moves. By contrast, Forster the novelist is worldly. He was a man of exquisite *social* sensibility, well aware of conflict as the space through which we must always move. Along with this went a highly developed kindliness toward all creatures that probably arose from his sense of his own difficult sexuality, his identification with women (ancestral and "old"-seeming women). He endured many slights as a man, as a writer many reproaches for seeming altogether too sinewy and inconsistent in the style of his beloved Montaigne. He was in Bloomsbury without being altogether of it – he had conscience.

Though Forster said he preferred Montaigne and Erasmus to Moses and St. Paul, he certainly believed in righteousness as well as personal grace. The problem he faced in *Howards End* – the social war, the class war, the manners war, the war of historic English hardness and even cruelty between the classes, was something that demanded a solution of him as it did not of his friends in Bloomsbury. They were preoccupied not only with "personal relations" but with modernism in art and psychology. Because of Cézanne and Freud, it seems, Virginia Woolf could say that human nature had "changed" around 1908. Forster was not a modernist in this sense, *her* sense. She was preoccupied with style as the structure necessary to narratives of interior consciousness. *Howards End* is not an experimental novel. The transitions and unexpected violence in it are surprising and in a sense delightful; they are there to move the story, not to reflect the author's originality. The style is not only subliminal, it is a form of conversation with the reader. And the reader, not stunned by Forster as he is by Joyce or Woolf, happily joins in. *Howards End* is a classical English novel, more like Jane Austen than like Virginia Woolf. The subject is classical – the social distrust between people, some of whom actually love each other but because of "differences" cannot easily live together. All handled with ingenuity, a bracing comic sense, a certain degree of what we now call "mysticism" (we are so unfamiliar with religious feeling in novelists), but which was just Forster's manifest sense of decency, his strong ethical sense, disarming in its casual tone. *Howards End* is a superb and wholly cherishable novel, one that admirers have no trouble reading over and again.

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One problem remains – how are we to take the fairy-tale resolution of the novel? How seriously are we to take this as any kind of solution or culmination? Max Beerbohm, who loved the first part of the book, was scornful of the rest. No doubt he thought it sentimental, much too willed. This is an understandable point that admirers of the book can accept without suffering, since they are so delighted with the intelligence of the book as a whole. This is particularly true of Americans, whose novels can never resemble *Howards End* in the slightest, and who can be as uncritical of the book as they are of the English countryside at its best. The novel is a lovely shapely object, a triumph of brilliant plotting and human sensibility that well disguises the fact that the savage reality of society has escaped it.

This has occurred to English readers and observers. An American feeling about *Howards End*, inspired by Lionel Trilling's influential little book on Forster (1943), is that the novel is a genial, beautifully proportioned work of art that American literature should envy. In the introduction to the 1964 edition of his book, Trilling proudly noted that his book had positively made Forster in America. He added:

> I have no doubt that I was benefited by the special energies that attend a polemical purpose. To some readers it will perhaps seem strange, even perverse, to have involved Mr. Forster in polemic, but I did just that – I had a quarrel with American literature at the time it was established, against what seemed to me its dullness and its pious social simplicities I enlisted Mr. Forster's vivacity, complexity, and irony. It was a quarrel that was to occupy me for some years; from the title of the introductory chapter of this book I took the name of my first volume of essays, The Liberal Imagination. The occasion of that cultural contention no longer exists, at least not in its old form, but it was an event of some importance in my intellectual life, and I would not wish to interfere with what I said in the course of it.

The "dullness and pious social simplicities" Trilling "quarrelled" with in American literature of the time surely could not have referred to such powerful talents as William Faulkner, Theodore Dreiser, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson – and a host of others. What bothered Trilling was not American literature but his own now discarded American radicalism, especially among his fellow members of the New York intelligentsia who had been disabused by Stalinism and were slowly but unmistakably making their way to the intellectual "neoconservatism" that has become a striking mode among New York children of East European immigrants, born in the first years of the twentieth century, who since the 1940s have become

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a major force in American intellectual life.

Forster himself, not the most bravura and self-confident talent in the world, was so encouraged by Trilling's book that he beamed on all Americans he met, saying, "Your Mr. Trilling has made me famous!" There was little reason for him to appreciate the situation *outre mer*. To Trilling and many other Americans weary of the corruption of the liberal imagination by the radical tradition – the unspoken premise behind Trilling's argument – Forster's England in *Howards End* resembled a moral paradise. Or a prig's?

Bernard Shaw liked to say "it's the common language that divides us." No, it's just the American difference. There was nothing in common between the England that presides over *Howards End* and the England that Forster's American admirers liked to see as a relief from their own more openly turbulent society. In a way the social problem in America is more hopeless, for the differences founded on race, the lasting wounds of slavery and unfashionable "national origin" may be harder to cross over than the differences between Schlegels and Wilcoxes – who at the end of the book do get to live in the same ancestral house. The only figures in America comparable to the first Mrs. Wilcox in deep unconscious wisdom, rooted to the earth, crazy about the earth long ago taken from them by white predators, are "native Americans." And they live not in the middle of the most respected society, like Mrs. Wilcox, but in segregated, horribly poor, isolated "reservations."

We in America have lots of Wilcoxes – they are the go-go boys who become corporation executives, Wall Street financiers and the rest. Nor do they look down on the culture of the Schlegel type, all museum curators and professors. They subsidize museums, concert halls, grants for writers, dancers, painters, performers of every stripe; culture adds to the prestige of their cities. And if Leonard Bast is at all imaginable and locatable in America it is because he emigrated here a long time ago in order to get into a state university. Leonard is in direct-mail marketing now, rapidly making his way to the top because of his gentlemanly English accent – always a great help in the American business world.

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CYNTHIA OZICK

Of Christian Heroism

There is a story about Clare Boothe Luce complaining that she was bored with hearing about the Holocaust. A Jewish friend of hers said he perfectly understood her sensitivity in the matter; in fact, he had the same sense of repetitiousness and fatigue, hearing so often about the Crucifixion.

Herbert Gold, "Selfish Like Me"

I.

Of the great European murder of six million Jews, and the murderers themselves, there is little to say. The barbaric years when Jews were hunted down for sport in the middle of the twentieth century have their hellish immortality, their ineradicable infamy, and will inflame the nightmares – and (perhaps) harrow the conscience – of the human race until the sun burns out and takes our poor earth-speck with it. Of the murder and the murderers everything is known that needs to be known: how it was done, who did it, who helped, where it was done, and when, and why. Especially why: the hatred of a civilization that teaches us to say No to hatred.

Three "participant" categories of the Holocaust are commonly named: murderers, victims, bystanders.* Imagination demands a choosing. Which, of this entangled trio, are we? Which are we most likely to have become? Probably it is hardest of all to imagine ourselves victims. After all, we were here and not there. Or we were Gentiles and not Jews or Gypsies. Or we were not yet born. But if we had already been born, if we were there and not here, if we were Jews and not Gentiles . . .

"If" is the travail of historians and philosophers, not of the ordinary human article. What we can be sure of without contradiction – we can be sure of it because we *are* the ordinary human article – is that, difficult as it might be to imagine ourselves among the victims, it is not in us even to begin to think of ourselves as likely murderers. The "banality of evil" is a catchword of our generation; but no, it is an unusual, an

*We owe the perception of these categories to Raul Hilberg's book, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders.* -C. O.

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exceptional, thing to volunteer for the S.S.; to force aged Jews to their knees to scrub the gutter with their beards; to empty Zyklon B canisters into the hole in the roof of the gas chamber; to enact those thousand thousand atrocities that lead to the obliteration of a people and a culture.

The victims take our pity and our horror, and whatever else we can, in our shame, cede to their memory. But they do not puzzle us. It does not puzzle us that the blood of the innocent cries up from the ground – how could it be otherwise? Even if humanity refuses to go on remembering, the voices crushed in the woods and under the fresh pavements of Europe press upward. The new plants that cover the places where corpses were buried in mass pits carry blood in their dew. Basement-whispers trouble the new blocks of flats that cover the streets where the flaming Warsaw Ghetto fell. The heavy old sideboards of the thirties that once stood in Jewish dining rooms in certain neighborhoods of Berlin and Vienna are in Catholic and Protestant dining rooms now, in neighborhoods where there are no longer any Jews; the great carved legs of these increasingly valued antiques groan and remember the looting. The books that were thrown onto bonfires in the central squares of every German city still send up their flocks of quivering phantom letters.

All that – the looting, the shooting, the herding, the forced marches, the gassing, the torching of synagogues, the cynicism, the mendacity, the shamelessness, the truncheons, the bloodthirstiness, the fanaticism, the opportunism, the Jews of Europe as prey, their dehumanization, the death factories, the obliteration of a civilization, the annihilation of a people – all that it is possible to study, if not to assimilate. Pious Jews, poor Jews, secular Jews, universalist Jews, baptized Jews, Jews who were storekeepers, or doctors, or carpenters, or professors, or teamsters, Jewish infants and children – all annihilated. Thousands upon thousands of Jewish libraries and schools looted and destroyed. Atrocity spawns an aftermath – perhaps an afterlife. In the last four decades the documents and the testimonies have been heaped higher and higher – yet a gash has been cut in the world's brain that cannot be healed by memorial conferences or monuments. Lamentation for the martyred belongs now to the history of cruelty and to the earth. There is no paucity of the means to remember; there may be a paucity of the will to remember. Still, we know what we think of the murders and the murderers. We are not at a loss to know how to regard them.

But what of the bystanders? They were not the criminals, after all. For the bystanders we should feel at least the pale warmth of recognition – call it self-recognition. And nowadays it is the bystanders whom we most notice, though at the time, while the crimes were in progress, they seemed the least noticeable. We notice them now because they are the

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ones we can most readily identify with. They are the ones imagination can most readily accommodate. A bystander is like you and me, the ordinary human article – what normal man or woman or adolescent runs to commit public atrocities? The luck of the draw (the odds of finding oneself in the majority) saves the bystander from direct victimhood: the Nuremberg "racial" laws, let us say, are what exempt the bystander from deportation. The bystander is, by definition, not a Jew or a Gypsy. The bystander stays home, safe enough if compliant enough. The bystander cannot be charged with taking part in any evil act; the bystander only watches as the evil proceeds. One by one, and suddenly all at once, the Jewish families disappear from their apartments in building after building, in city after city. The neighbors watch them go. One by one, and suddenly all at once, the Jewish children disappear from school. Their classmates resume doing their sums.

The neighbors are decent people – decent enough for ordinary purposes. They cannot be blamed for not being heroes. A hero – like a murderer – is an exception and (to be coarsely direct) an abnormality, a kind of social freak. No one ought to be expected to become a hero. Not that the bystanders are, taken collectively, altogether blameless. In the Germany of the thirties it was they – because there were so many of them – who created the norm. The conduct of the bystanders – again because there were so many of them – defined what was common and what was uncommon, what was exceptional and what was unexceptional, what was heroic and what was quotidian. If the bystanders in all their numbers had not been so docile, if they had not been so conciliatory, or, contrariwise, if they had not been so "inspired" (by slogans and rabble-rousers and uniforms and promises of national glory), if they had not acquiesced both through the ballot box and alongside the parades – if, in short, they had not been *so many* – the subject of heroism would never have had to arise.

When a whole population takes on the status of bystander, the victims are without allies; the criminals, unchecked, are strengthened; and only then do we need to speak of heroes. When a field is filled from end to end with sheep, a stag stands out. When a continent is filled from end to end with the compliant, we learn what heroism is. And alas for the society that requires heroes.

Most of us, looking back, and identifying as we mainly do with the bystanders - because it is the most numerous category, into which simple demographic likelihood thrusts us; or because surely it is the easiest category, the most recognizably human, if not the most humane – will admit to some perplexity, a perplexity brought on by hindsight. Taken collectively, as I dared to do a moment ago, the bystanders are culpable. But taking human beings "collectively" is precisely what we are obliged

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to do. Then consider the bystanders not as a group, not as a stereotype, but one by one. If the bystander is the ordinary human article, as we have agreed, what can there be to puzzle us? This one, let us say, is a good and zealous hater (no one can deny that hating belongs to the ordinary human article), encouraged by epaulets, posters, flashy rhetoric, and pervasive demagoguery. And this one is an envious malcontent, lustful for a change of leadership. And this one is a simple patriot. And this one, unemployed, is a dupe of the speechmakers. Such portraits, both credible and problematical, are common enough. But let us concede that most of the bystanders were quiet citizens who wanted nothing more than to get on with their private lives: a portrait entirely palatable to you and me. The ordinary human article seeks nothing more complex than the comforts of indifference to public clamor of any kind. Indifference is a way of sheltering oneself from evil; who would interpret such unaggressive sheltering as a contribution to evil? The ordinary human article hardly looks to get mixed up in active and wholesale butchery of populations; what rational person would want to accuse the bystander – who has done no more than avert her eyes – of a hardness-of-heart in any way approaching that of the criminals? That would be a serious lie – a distortion both of fact and of psychological understanding.

Yet it is the nature of indifference itself that bewilders. How is it that indifference, which on its own does no apparent or immediate positive harm, ends by washing itself in the very horrors it means to have nothing to do with? Hoping to confer no hurt, indifference finally grows lethal; why is that? Can it be that indifference, ostensibly passive, harbors an unsuspected robustness? The act of turning toward – while carrying a club – is an act of brutality; but the act of turning away, however empty-handed and harmlessly, remains nevertheless an *act*. The whole truth may be that the idea of human passivity is nothing but the illusion of wistful mortals; and that waking into the exigencies of our own time – whichever way we turn, toward or away – implies action. To be born is to be compelled to act.

One of the most curious (and mephitic) powers of indifference is its retroactive capacity: it is possible to be indifferent *nunc pro tunc*. I am thinking of a few sentences I happened to be shown the other day: they were from the pen of a celebrated author who was commenting on a piece of so-called "Holocaust writing." "These old events," she complained, "can rake you over only so much, and then you long for a bit of satire on it all. Like so many others of my generation" – she was a young adult during the forties – "who had nothing to do with any of it, I've swallowed all the guilt I can bear, and if I'm going to be lashed, I intend to save my skin for more recent troubles in the world."

Never mind the odd protestation of innocence where nothing has

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been charged – what secret unquiet lies within this fraying conscience? What is odder still is that a statement of retroactive indifference is represented as a commitment to present compassion. As for present compassion, does anyone doubt that there is enough contemporary suffering to merit one's full notice? Besides, a current indifference to "these old events" seems harmless enough now; the chimneys of Dachau and Birkenau and Belsen have been cold for the last forty-five years. But does this distinguished figure – a voice of liberalism as well as noteworthy eloquence – suppose that indifference to "old events" frees one for attention to new ones? In fact, indifference to past suffering is a sure sign that there will be indifference to present suffering. Jaded feelings have little to do with the staleness of any event. To be "jaded" is to decline to feel at all.

And that is perhaps the central point about indifference, whether retroactive or current. Indifference is not so much a gesture of looking away – of choosing to be passive – as it is an active disinclination to feel. Indifference shuts down the humane, and does it deliberately, with all the strength deliberateness demands. Indifference is as determined – and as forcefully muscular – as any blow. For the victims on their way to the chimneys, there is scarcely anything to choose between a thug with an uplifted truncheon and the decent citizen who will not lift up his eyes.

II.

We have spoken of three categories: criminal, victim, bystander. There is a fourth category – so minuscule that statistically it vanishes. Fortunately it is not a category that can be measured by number – its measure is metaphysical and belongs to the sublime. "Whoever saves a single life," says the Talmud, "is as one who has saved an entire world." This is the category of those astounding souls who refused to stand by as their neighbors were being hauled away to the killing sites. They were willing to see, to judge, to decide. Not only did they not avert their eyes – they set out to rescue. They are the heroes of Nazified Europe. They are Polish, Italian, Romanian, Russian, Hungarian, French, Yugoslavian, Swiss, Swedish, Dutch, Spanish, German. They are Catholic and Protestant. They are urban and rural; educated and uneducated; sophisticated and simple; they include nuns and socialists. And whatever they did, they did at the risk of their lives.

It is typical of all of them to deny any heroism. "It was only decent," they say. But no: most people are decent; the bystanders were decent. The rescuers are somehow raised above the merely decent. When the rescuers declare that heroism is beside the point, it is hard to agree with them.

There is, however, another view, one that takes the side of the rescuers. Under the steady Jerusalem sun stands a low and somber building

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known as Yad Vashem: a memorial to the Six Million, a place of mourning, a substitute for the missing headstones of the victims; there are no graveyards for human beings ground into bone meal and flown into evanescent smoke. But Yad Vashem is also a grove of celebration and honor: a grand row of trees, one for each savior, marks the valor of the Christian rescuers of Europe, called the Righteous Among the Nations. Mordechai Paldiel, the director of the Department for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, writing in *The Jerusalem Post* not long ago, offered some arresting reflections on the "normality" of goodness:

> We are somehow determined to view these benefactors as heroes: hence the search for underlying motives. The Righteous persons, however, consider themselves as anything but heroes, and regard their behavior during the Holocaust as quite normal. How to resolve this enigma?
>
> For centuries we have undergone a brain-washing process by philosophers who emphasized man's despicable character, highlighting his egotistic and evil disposition at the expense of other attributes. Wittingly or not, together with Hobbes and Freud, we accept the proposition that man is essentially an aggressive being, bent on destruction, involved principally with himself, and only marginally interested in the needs of others. . . .
>
> Goodness leaves us gasping, for we refuse to recognize it as a natural human attribute. So off we go on a long search for some hidden motivation, some extraordinary explanation, for such peculiar behavior.
>
> Evil is, by contrast, less painfully assimilated. There is no comparable search for the reasons for its constant manifestation (although in earlier centuries theologians pondered this issue).
>
> We have come to terms with evil. Television, movies and the printed word have made evil, aggression and egotism household terms and unconsciously acceptable to the extent of making us immune to displays of evil. There is a danger that the evil of the Holocaust will be absorbed in a similar manner; that is, explained away as further confirmation of man's inherent disposition to wrongdoing. It confirms our visceral feeling that man is an irredeemable beast, who needs to be constrained for his own good.
>
> In searching for an explanation of the motivations of the Righteous Among the Nations, are we not really saying: what was wrong with them? Are we not, in a deeper sense, implying that their behavior was something other than normal? . . . Is acting benevolently and altruistically such an outlandish and unusual type of behavior, supposedly at odds with man's inherent character, as to justify a meticulous search for explanations? Or is it conceivable that such behavior is as natural to our psychological constitution as the

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egoistic one we accept so matter-of-factly?

It is Mr. Paldiel's own goodness that leaves me gasping. How I want to assent to his thesis! How alluring it is! His thesis asserts that it is the rescuers who are in possession of the reality of human nature, not the bystanders; it is the rescuers who are the ordinary human article. "In a place where there are no human beings, *be* one" – it is apparent that the rescuers were born to embody this rabbinic text. It is not, they say, that they are exceptions; it is that they are human. They are not to be considered "extraordinary," "above the merely decent."

Yet their conduct emphasizes - exemplifies – the exceptional.

For instance:

Giorgio Perlasca, an Italian from Padua, had a job in the Spanish Embassy in Budapest. When the Spanish envoy fled before the invading Russians, Perlasca substituted the Spanish "Jorge" for the Italian "Giorgio" and passed himself off as the Spanish chargé d'affairs. He carried food and powdered milk to safe houses under the Spanish flag, where several hundred Jews at a time found a haven. He issued protective documents that facilitated the escape of Jews with Spanish passes. "I began to feel like a fish in water," he said of his life as an impostor: the sole purpose of his masquerade was to save Jews. And he saved thousands.

Bert Berchove was a Dutch upholsterer who lived with his wife and two children in a large apartment over his shop, in a town not far from Amsterdam. At first he intended to help only his wife's best friend, who was Jewish; her parents had already been deported. Berchove constructed a hiding place in the attic, behind a false wall. Eventually thirty-seven Jews were hidden there.

In a Dominican convent near Vilna, seven nuns and their mother superior sheltered a number of Jews who had escaped from the ghetto, including some poets and writers. The fugitives were disguised in nuns' habits. The sisters did not stop at hiding Jews: they scoured the countryside for weapons to smuggle into the ghetto.

Who will say that the nuns, the upholsterer, and the impostor are not extraordinary in their altruism, their courage, the electrifying boldness of their imaginations? How many nuns have we met who would think of dressing Jewish poets in wimples? How many upholsterers do we know who would actually design and build a false wall? Who among us would dream of fabricating a fake diplomatic identity in order to save Jewish lives? Compassion, it is clear, sharpens intuition and augments imagination.

For me, the rescuers are *not* the ordinary human article. Nothing would have been easier than for each and every one of them to have re-

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mained a bystander, like all those millions of their countrymen in the nations of Europe. It goes without saying that the bystanders, especially in the occupied lands, had troubles enough of their own, and hardly needed to go out of their way to acquire new burdens and frights. I do not – cannot – believe that human beings are, without explicit teaching, naturally or intrinsically altruistic. I do not believe, either, that they are naturally vicious, though they can be trained to be. The truth (as with most truths) seems to be somewhere in the middle: most people are born bystanders. The ordinary human article does not want to be disturbed by extremes of any kind – not by risks, or adventures, or unusual responsibility.

And those who undertook the risks, those whose bravery steeped them in perilous contingencies, those whose moral strength urged them into heart-stopping responsibility – what (despite their demurrals) are they really, if not the heroes of our battered world? What other name can they possibly merit? In the Europe of the most savage decade of the twentieth century, not to be a bystander was the choice of an infinitesimal few. These few are more substantial than the multitudes from whom they distinguished themselves; and it is from these undeniably heroic and principled few that we can learn the full resonance of civilization.

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JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL

The Flight from Truth

The foremost of all the forces that drive the world is falsehood. More than any before it, twentieth-century civilization has depended on information, teaching, science, culture – in short, on knowledge, as well as on a system of government which, by its very definition, seeks to make knowledge available to all: democracy. Clearly, freedom of information, like democracy itself, has known enormous variations in its practical application from one country to the next. Few are the countries in which both have managed to get through the century without an interruption, or indeed without an outright suppression, lasting several generations. But no matter how intermittent the part information plays in influencing the persons who determine the course of events (for example, political leaders) and those who react to those events, it is today unquestionably more important, more constant, and more widely diffused than in earlier times. Those who act have better data on which to base their actions, and those on the receiving end are much better informed about what those who act are doing.

It is therefore interesting to inquire whether this preponderance of available knowledge – with its detail, its abundance, its ever broader and swifter dissemination – has enabled humanity to guide itself more judiciously than in the past. The question is all the more important since the perfecting and accelerating of the techniques of transmission and the steady increase in the number of individuals who benefit from them will make the twenty-first century an age in which, even more than in the twentieth, information will be a central element of civilization.

Our century has witnessed a notable increase of knowledge along with a similar increase in the number of human beings who have access to that knowledge. In other words, knowledge – and in particular scientific knowledge – has increased, and it has been accompanied by an enormous expansion in the volume of information making it available to the general public. To begin with, the educational process is being pro-

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longed ever further, into late adolescence, and various forms of education are being made available to adults. At the same time, the tools of mass communication have been multiplying and now shower us with words and images to a degree inconceivable in the past. Whether it is to popularize the news of a scientific discovery and the technical prospects it opens up, to announce a political event, or to publish figures enabling one to analyze an economic situation, the universal information machine is becoming more and more egalitarian and generous, ceaselessly reducing the old discrimination between the elite in power, who knew little, and the common run of the ruled, who knew nothing. Now both know – or can know – a great deal. The superiority of our century over preceding centuries seems to be due to the fact that those in positions of authority in all walks of life have increasingly had at their disposal a far greater and more abundant fund of information and knowledge with which to prepare their decisions, while the public is receiving an abundance of information which should enable it to judge the correctness or wisdom of those decisions. Such an auspicious convergence of favorable factors should logically have engendered a prodigious improvement in the human condition. But has this happened?

To answer "yes" would be frivolous. Ours has been one of the bloodiest centuries in human history, marked by the vast scope of its oppressions, persecutions, exterminations. It is the twentieth century that invented, or at least systematized, genocide, the concentration camp, the extermination of entire peoples by organized famine, which conceived in theory and instituted in practice the most advanced systems of bondage that have ever been devised to crush such huge numbers of human beings. These astonishing achievements would appear to undermine the notion that our age has seen the triumph of democracy. And yet, in spite of everything, our age has seen just that, and for two good reasons. Notwithstanding many setbacks, the century is moving toward its close with a greater number of democracies, and these in far better working order, than at any other moment of history. Furthermore, even though flouted and abused, democracy has imposed itself on nearly everyone as the theoretical norm. The divergences concern methods – the "false" or "true" application of the democratic principle. Even if we deplore the mendacious character of tyrannies that claim to operate in the name of a supposedly genuine democracy or with the promise of a "perfect" democracy forever just over the horizon, we must readily admit that the species of dictatorial regimes that were founded on the explicit, doctrinal rejection of democracy disappeared with the collapse of Fascism in 1945 and of Francoism in 1975. Those that remain are marginal.

Recently tyrannies have at least been reduced to justifying themselves in the name of a morality they violate and have been driven to verbal

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acrobatics which, given their monotonous implausibility, take in fewer dupes each day. The employment of this double-talk does not affect the problem of the effectiveness of information. Totalitarian leaders, who try to control everything, have as much information at their disposal as do democratic leaders, even if they desperately try to keep it from their subjects, albeit with incomplete success. The economic failures of communist countries, for example, have not stemmed from the fact that their leaders were ignorant of the causes. In general, they have known the reasons well and occasionally, obliquely, they have admitted as much. But they have not wanted to, and could not, suppress those causes, at least not completely, and often they have done no more than attack the symptoms, fearing to jeopardize a political and social system more precious in their eyes than economic success. In such cases, the reason for the ineffectiveness of information itself is understandable. One can always refrain from using what one knows. Frequently in the life of societies, as of individuals, the truth is ignored because drawing the pertinent conclusions would be contrary to one's interests.

Nevertheless, the inability of information to influence actions, or simply convictions, would be a commonplace misfortune were it due merely to censorship, hypocrisy, and falsehood. It would still be comprehensible if to those causes were added the mechanisms of intellectual dishonesty so pointedly exposed over the ages by moralists and playwrights, novelists and psychologists. Still, it is surprising to see how all-pervasive these mechanisms of bad faith have become, in what is now a veritable global industry of communication. The public's perfunctory opinion of journalists as well as politicians is usually severe; it tends to regard dishonesty as a kind of second nature existing in most of those whose mission it is to inform, to think, to speak, to manage. Could it be that the very abundance of accessible knowledge and available information arouses in some minds a desire to bury them rather than use them? Could it be that the insidious invasion of the truth here and there unleashes resentment rather than satisfaction, a sense of peril rather than of power? How can we explain the rarity of accurate and precise information in free societies, where those who are curious have ready access to information and where most of the material obstacles to the diffusion of knowledge have disappeared? Yes, by raising such questions one approaches the misty banks of the real mystery.

"Open" societies, to adopt the adjective used by Henri Bergson and Karl Popper, are both the cause and the effect of freedom to inform and to inform oneself. Yet those who gather information frequently seem moved by a desire to falsify the evidence, and those who receive to elude it. In such societies the duty to inform and the public's right to information are endlessly invoked. But journalists (and of course politi

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cians) are as ready to betray this duty as their clients are reluctant to take advantage of their right. In the hypocritical game played out by the partners in this informational comedy, producers and consumers pretend to respect each other, whereas in fact they fear and in some cases despise each other.

Only in open societies can one observe and measure the genuine zeal human beings show for saying and welcoming (or ignoring) the truth, since its circulation is unhampered by anything but themselves. But – and this is not the least intriguing aspect of this situation – how can they so often act against their own interests? For democracy cannot thrive without a certain diet of truth. It cannot survive if the degree of truth in current circulation falls below a minimal level. A democratic regime, founded on the free determination of important choices made by a majority, condemns itself to death if most of the citizens who have to choose between various options make their decisions in ignorance of reality, blinded by passions or misled by fleeting impressions. If in a democracy information is so free, so sacred, it is because it can thwart everything that obscures the judgment of the citizens, the ultimate deciders and judges of the public weal. But what happens if the judgment of the judges is obscured by the nature of the information dispensed? For let us be honest in facing this fundamental fact: those who cultivate competence, accuracy, and intellectual honesty tend to be the smallest segment of the journalistic community, their audience the smallest sector of the public. Only too often the big newspaper stories, the televised documentaries or debates, the press campaigns that generate the greatest heat and dust turn out to be of an informational poverty matched only by the inherent fraudulence of sensation seeking. Even what is popularly called "investigative journalism," which is praised as the very model of courage or intransigence, is significantly swayed by motivations that are not always determined by the disinterested cult of full and fairly interpreted information. Often a particular dossier is brought to light less for its intrinsic merit than because it is capable of destroying a particular statesman or politician. This or that other dossier, of infinitely greater import for the general welfare, is neglected or sidetracked because it lacks any immediate personal, partisan, or popular utility.

Whatever may be said about journalism (and I shall say a great deal), we should beware of incriminating journalists. If, indeed, far too few of them live up to the theoretical ideal, it is, I must insist, because they get precious little encouragement from the public; and so it is to the general public, and thus to each one of us, that one must look for the causes of the supremacy of incompetent or unscrupulous journalists. The supply is determined by the demand. But the demand, in matters of information and analysis, emanates from our own convictions. And how are these

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formed? We adopt our most cherished preferences in such a welter of approximation, prejudice, and passion that later, when confronted by a novel fact, we sniff at it and weigh it less for its exactness than for its capacity to serve or to counter our system of interpretation, our sense of moral comfort, our attachment to a network of personal relationships and loyalties. According to the laws that govern the mixture of words, attachments, wishes, hatreds, notions, and fears that we call "opinion," a fact is neither real nor unreal; rather, it is desirable or undesirable. It serves as an accomplice or plotter, as an ally or adversary, not as an object that needs to be known. At times we even elevate this priority of possible utilization over readily available knowledge to the status of a doctrine, thus justifying it in principle.

That our opinions, no matter how disinterested, stem from diverse influences among which a genuine knowledge of the subject or of the objective situation is often in last place – behind beliefs, cultural factors, chance, appearances, different forms of bias, the desire to see reality conform to our prejudices, mental laziness – none of this is really new. Such has been the case since the day Plato taught us the difference between opinion and science. And indeed, the novelty is even less today, inasmuch as the development of science since Plato's time has steadily accentuated the distinction between the verifiable and the unverifiable, between a process of reasoning that is demonstrable and one that is not. But simply to realize that we are now living in a world fashioned more than ever by the applications of scientific research is not to guarantee that more human beings than ever think in scientific terms. Most of us use tools fashioned by science, take care of our health thanks to science, have or do not have children thanks to science, without, intellectually speaking, having anything to do with the scientific disciplines responsible for the discoveries from which we benefit. In addition, even the tiny minority of persons who are engaged in those disciplines acquire their nonscientific convictions in irrational ways. By virtue of its specific nature, scientific work imposes criteria that cannot in the long run be eluded. In the same way a sprinter, no matter how crazy or stupid he may be outside, accepts the rational law of the stopwatch once he has entered the stadium. There would be no point in his copying the politician or the artist by putting up posters or advertisements, or by holding public meetings in order to proclaim himself a world champion and to announce that he can run the hundred-meter dash in eight seconds, when everyone can verify the fact that he has never been clocked under eleven seconds. Though obliged by the rules of the track to behave rationally, he is, however, quite capable of running down an ascending escalator. A great scientist can forge his political and moral opinions in just as arbitrary a fashion and under the sway of considerations that are as insane as those

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who have no experience of scientific reasoning. There is in his internal makeup no necessary osmosis between the mental activity to which he is constrained by his discipline – to make no assertion without proof – and his opinions on current affairs and everyday matters, where he is subject to the same enthusiasms and prejudices as any other man. Like him and in just as unforeseeable a way, he can incline toward common sense or extravagance and turn his back on the evidence when it counters his beliefs or preferences or sympathies.

To live in an age modeled by science does not, consequently, render any of us much more likely to behave in a scientific manner – outside of those fields and conditions in which the constraint of scientific procedures reigns supreme. When he has a choice, man is today neither more nor less rational and honest than he was in the epochs designated as prescientific. To return to the previously mentioned paradox, one can even argue that intellectual incoherence and dishonesty are more alarming and serious nowadays since, in the case of science, we have before us a model of what rigorous thinking can be. But the scientific researcher is not by nature a more honest man than the ignoramus. He is someone who has voluntarily locked himself inside rules that condemn him, so to speak, to honesty. A particular ignoramus may temperamentally be more honest than such-and-such a scientist. In disciplines that cannot by their very nature provide total demonstrable constraint, imposing itself from outside on the researcher's subjectivity – for example, the social sciences and history – we often see, alas, the flourishing of lightheadedness, insincerity, the ideological manipulation of facts, and the tendentiousness of clan rivalries, which occasionally take precedence over the pure love of truth by which such researchers are supposedly consumed.

It is well to recall these elementary caveats, for we shall understand nothing of the torments of our supposedly scientific age unless we realize that when we speak of "scientific behavior" we should not refer exclusively to those mental procedures that are, strictly speaking, the properties of scientific research. To behave scientifically – that is, by combining rationality and honesty – means not to express an opinion about a question without considering all of the information at one's disposal, without deliberately eliminating anything, without deforming or expurgating a single element, and after reaching as best and as honestly as one can the conclusions that seem called for. Nine times out of ten the available information will not be complete enough or its interpretation sufficiently rigorous to lead to a certainty. But if the final judgment rarely has a completely scientific character, the attitude leading toward it can always have this character. The Platonic distinction between opinion and science – or, to put it better (in my opinion), between conjectural judgment (*doxa*) and certain knowledge (*episteme*) – is based on the raw material

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about which one opines and not on the attitude of the person formulating the opinion. Whether it is a matter of simple opinion or certain knowledge, in both cases Plato assumed that logic and intellectual honesty prevail. The difference springs from the fact that certain knowledge is derived from things that lend themselves to irrefutable demonstration, whereas opinion roams through regions where all we can do is collect a bundle of likelihoods. It is nonetheless true that an opinion, even when merely plausible and bereft of absolute certainty, can (or cannot) be forged in as rigorous a manner as possible on the basis of an honest examination of all accessible data. Conjecture is not the same as arbitrary judgment. It requires no less probity, no less exactitude, no less erudition than science. On the contrary, conjecture may require even more, given that the virtue of prudence constitutes its principal safeguard.

Respect for the truth – or at least its imperfect approximation – and the wish to use the information at our disposal in an honest manner spring from personal inclinations that are quite independent of the state of contemporary science. In all probability the percentage of human beings possessing such inclinations was not appreciably smaller in prescientific periods than it is today. Or rather, one would like to know if the existence in our present-day world of a definite standard of certain (that is, scientific) knowledge has necessarily resulted in the appearance among us of a higher percentage of persons inclined to think rationally. Before hazarding an answer to this question, let us simply remind ourselves that in any case far and away the largest number of issues about which contemporary mankind forms its convictions and takes its decisions belongs to the conjectural sector of human thought and not to the scientific one. We nevertheless enjoy a considerable superiority over those who lived before us, for in this same conjectural sector we can exploit a wealth of information that was unknown to them. Thus, quite apart from the advantages of science, our chances are greater than ever, in other fields as well, of arriving at what Plato called "true opinion" – that is, of conjecture which, although not based on a binding demonstrability, is nonetheless correct. But do we profit as much as we should from such opportunities? On the answer to this question depends the survival of our civilization.

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MARK LILLA

Letter from Italy

The seven hundred year-old Siennese Palio had to be canceled last July, for only the second time in living memory. The well-known (and now well-touristed) horse race, which features bareback riders from rival quarters of the old town dashing around the Campo, ordinarily takes place just before dusk. But this year several riders refused to bring their horses up to the starting line in their assigned order. Since these particular riders knew they had little chance of winning, their strategy was instead to prevent their traditional neighborhood rival from taking away the banner. The pushing and jockeying continued for over an hour until straws were drawn again, but the new lineup was no more successful in convincing the obstructionists to join in. Finally, with the sun setting at half-past nine, the nationally televised race was called off, to the deep embarrassment of city officials and the outrage of German visitors. It was eventually run the next evening, though not without new litigious jostling.

Italian politics and its intellectual debates will always remain a mystery to those who do not grasp the Palio Principle. Whereas in the rest of Western Europe political energy is usually spent on advancing particular partisan positions, usually in coalition with like-minded partners, almost all the political energy in Italy is spent on blocking the advance of one's nearest rival, disregarding common aims. Many explanations of this perverse strategy have been put forward by students of Italian politics: late national unification, the historical dominance of the Church and occupying powers, the backwardness of the South, the present system of proportional representation, Machiavelli, the Mafia, even a mannerist predeliction for chaos over order.

Each of these historical explanations is plausible enough, but none really tells us why this medieval mentality persists in the midst of an otherwise modern country. Having returned to Italy last summer after living here four years ago, I was disturbed to see how deeply rooted the Palio Principle remains, even in the face of the recent dramatic transformation of world politics. In these four years we have witnessed the liberation of Eastern Europe, the slow crumbling of the Soviet Union, the disappearance of communism as an ideological question in world politics, the gradual integration of Europe, and a successful war in the Middle East.

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But despite some superficial changes on the Italian political landscape, recent history seems to have had very little effect on the parochialism of intellectuals here. The same might be said (and certainly should be said) of American intellectuals. But while geography limits the damage of our provincialism, the Italians are rooted in a continent that is feeling the final, and perhaps most powerful, tremors of its twentieth-century history. What makes political debate so discouraging in Italy today is that its intellectuals seem utterly unaware of what is happening around them and still act as if they were on the Siennese Campo.

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The neighborhood rivalries of Italian intellectuals have been rigidly fixed since World War II and are perfectly transparent to everyone involved. It is simply taken for granted that the government will be dominated by the right and that this obliges all thinking and feeling creatures to remain loyal to the idea of *la sinistra*. Although there have been important anticommunist liberals and social democrats of the center (Croce before the war, Chiaromonte, Silone, and Bobbio after it), the fact remains that cultural life is almost the exclusive reserve of the left and is likely to remain so. This array of political and intellectual forces was not peculiar to Italy, of course; it developed throughout Europe after the war and remained strong until recently. But there are special reasons why the cultural canyon between institutional politics and intellectual politics that is disappearing elsewhere (in France, in Spain) still remains wide here.

The most important reason is that Italy's radically atomized system of proportional representation has guaranteed the continuous dominance of the Christian Democrats (DC), the most retrograde conservative party in Europe. Italy has seen fifty governments come and go over the past forty-three years, but all of them have been dominated by the same figures of the *partitocrazia*; seven alone have been headed by the cynical and ruthless Giulio Andreotti (DC), the country's current prime minister. The party represents nothing – programatically, culturally, intellectually. Indeed, it has never won a clear majority in any recent election. But the existence of the Italian Communist Party always guaranteed it the right to form a governing coalition. During most of the postwar period the Communists garnered nearly as many votes as the DC, but the Party's unwillingness either to break fully with its Stalinist past (even under Enrico Berlinguer), or to condemn unequivocally the terrorism of the 1970s, left the small centrist parties little choice but to hold their collective nose and join with the DC. Culturally, this compromise encouraged most intellectuals and artists to side with the left, if only to defend their independence from the DC – and even at the risk of then sacrificing that independence to the Party. As occurred under the French Fourth Repub

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lic, the apparently democratic system of proportional representation managed only to radicalize the ideological extremes of Italian politics, rendering the liberal intellectual center untenable, and insuring institutional stasis.

For a moment, if just a moment, it seemed that this political and ideological paralysis might come to an end after the events of 1989-90. In the fall of 1990 the Italian Communist Party voted to change its name to that of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) and replaced its traditional hammer and sickle with the pacific symbol of a tree. (However, in a compromise with the old guard, a small hammer and sickle still can be seen in the tree's roots.) Even *Unità*, whose subtitle had always been "The Newspaper of the Italian Communist Party," now simply proclaims "Founded by Antonio Gramsci." These were meant to be more than cosmetic changes. Ever since becoming leader five years ago, Chairman Achille Occhetto has consistently moved the party away from its Berlinguer equivocations and more aggressively towards other European social-democratic parties.

But the structures and habits of Italian political life are such that the formation of a non-Communist reformist coalition seems as remote as ever. Several new parties have cropped up in the past decade in the wake of Communist decline, and each seems intent on asserting its independence and sabotaging compromise. Even within the new PDS there is hardly consensus on forming a center-left coalition that could oust the sclerotic DC. One wing of the party, the so-called *miglioristi*, are willing to try, even if that means abandoning the party's independent tradition and joining with Bettino Craxi's Socialist Party, now the country's third largest. But a left splinter group, called Rifondazione Communista, considers Craxi the devil incarnate and has succeeded in calling a significant proportion of the faithful back to the hammer and sickle.

So although the vast majority of intellectuals and a large fraction of politicians loudly proclaim loyalty to the idea of *la sinistra*, they spend most of their time knifing their party rivals. Meanwhile, the graft and incompetence spread, the public debt accumulates, new scandals are covered over, and public power is steadily ceded to the *antistato* of organized crime. Andreotti just grins and rules.

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Political responsibility can breed political and intellectual moderation. This would seem to be the lesson of Spanish and French socialism in the 1980s. Looking to France in particular one can trace how the socialists' acquisition of power in 1981 led directly to a moderation of their political program (mainly through that program's own failures). It also produced a more general intellectual détente that eventually ex-

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hausted the very idea of socialism and revived a dormant liberal tradition. So it is perhaps not surprising that the Italian political left, denied real political participation by external and internal forces, remains somewhat loyal to an intellectual and cultural tradition that is dying out among its European neighbors. This is not to say that the Italian left is unchanged since the 1970s. On the contrary, there has already been a quite significant shift to the center. But because loyalty to the idea of *la sinistra* remains such a powerful force, this centering has had to take place surreptitiously, and without a serious confrontation either with the errors of the past or with other, more liberal alternatives. This moderation that dares not speak its name has a price, especially in historical truth. But perhaps the highest is that the left remains self-absorbed and ever susceptible to the Palio Principle.

This is certainly the impression one receives from reading the newest and most talked about publication on the left, the satirical weekly titled *Cuore*. The history of *Cuore* is a revealing one: begun some years back as a supplement to the old *Unità*, it soon became more popular than the paper enveloping it. Early this year it was relaunched as an independent publication, and circulation quickly topped 150,000. And with good reason. Every Monday the staff writers and cartoonists cull the past week's harvest of scandals, crimes, cover-ups, and gaffes, and whips them into a wildly hilarious *misto* published on sixteen green broad-sheet pages. Very little of its humor can be translated without reference to often obscure and ephemeral domestic events, but if one imagines a radical, scatological, printed version of the original "Saturday Night Live" show, one gets the general idea.

Cuore has been compared to the British *Private Eye* and the French *Canard Enchainé*, and there are some superficial similarities. But while these other satire papers have readers of every political tendency, *Cuore* has come to represent its own tendency, a party within the party of the left. *Cuore* is subtitled "The Human Resistance Weekly" and would like to represent itself as a simple spokesman for *la normalità* in the midst of the dirtiest, most corrupt political system in Europe. But its own history and its own rhetoric clearly mark it as a paper by the left and about the left.

The question is, which left? This question was debated all last summer, both in the pages of *Cuore* and in the popular press. The Communist old guard attacks it as reactionary, correctly pointing out that satire has traditionally been associated with the right in Italy. (Giovanni Guareschi's burlesque postwar stories mocking the hapless Communist Peppone are typical.) Editorialists at *Corriere della Sera* have called its publishers "the last Stalinists" for their irreverent comments about the

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crumbling of the Soviet empire.

Closer to the mark are those critics who see in *Cuore* yet another splinter phenomenon, as representing an amorphous and rather incoherent *sinistra post-tutto*, or what has also been called *la sinistra qualunquista* (the "whatever" left). Its writers – and, one supposes, its readers – mock everyone in politics without taking responsibility for any particular doctrine. They also display an adolescent contempt for serious discourse that encourages the reader to take pop culture more seriously than institutional politics. For example, every week the back cover of *Cuore* is devoted to a list of "the things worth living for" as voted by its readers. The list is topped by "love" and "friends," moves into politics ("the end of Andreotti," "Craxi begs our pardon"), and then descends into soccer teams, rock groups, comic book heroes, and women's private parts.

It is hard not to sympathize with the *qualunquismo* of *Cuore*'s readers. Nowhere in Western Europe does liberal democracy seem less liberal, less democratic; nowhere does serious politics seem so exclusively the preserve of criminals and fools. But one cannot help feeling that the paper's satirical deflation of politics came along at just the wrong moment. Given Italy's recent history, it is clear that if the liberalization of its institutions and culture is to happen, it will not come from the valiant but insignificant liberal center; rather it must await the liberalization of the left. Yet just as one sees signs of this beginning, *Cuore* has invented a new and popular mode of resisting it. Its weapon is comic levelling. The paper mocks Stalinism and capitalism equally. Saddam Hussein and George Bush appear equally contemptible. And although *Cuore* despises Prime Minister Andreotti and the emotionally unstable President Francesco Cossiga (both DC), its preferred target is clearly Socialist leader Bettino Craxi. *Cuore* cannot forgive Craxi for joining coalitions with the DC in the 1980s, and even serving for a time as prime minister. They treat Craxi's party as a non-ideological personality cult with no roots in the socialist tradition (which is not entirely off the mark). But any hope of wresting power from the DC and liberalizing the regime must pass through a coalition with the Socialists, as even the *miglioristi* in the PDS have recognized. But for *Cuore* and its readers, this would be the ultimate treason against *la sinistra*: better fifty years more in the desert than making peace with Craxi. As editor Michele Serra has written, if it takes two to tango, and Craxi is the only available partner, *Cuore* prefers to sit out. The Palio Principle once again.

★

Despite its fast-growing circulation, *Cuore*'s real influence is difficult to gauge; it remains just one among countless left-wing publications that

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appear here. Italian newsstands groan under these monthlies and quarterlies, virtually none of which seem to be read outside of the tiny, geographically dispersed cells that produce them. (How they support themselves is another Italian mystery.) Despite the almost uniform fealty of intellectuals to the ideal of *la sinistra*, there is no single magazine or review that commands universal critical attention, surely nothing to rival the centrality of the *New York Review of Books* in the United States, or *Le Débat* in France.

The only periodical that comes close is a relatively new one titled *MicroMega*. This gorgeously produced review is well worth reading, even for foreigners interested in keeping up with more general European cultural developments. It was launched in 1986 by Paolo Flores d'Arcais, a young journalist, and Giorgio Ruffolo, a Socialist politician who currently serves as Italy's Minister of the Environment. To judge by the review's subtitle ("Le ragioni della sinistra"), and by the early numbers, the review was apparently conceived as yet another springboard for relaunching the Italian left. Although a significant proportion of its articles still echo this theme, the great attraction of *MicroMega* is that it takes European and world politics more seriously than the horserace in the Italian campo. And for just that reason it has brought a breath of fresh air to the cramped, stale debates about institutional reform and the place of intellectuals in Italian politics.

From the start, the editors of *MicroMega* have brought its readers into contact with some of the most interesting thinkers and writers in Eastern Europe, Germany, Spain, France, and Israel. (They seem somewhat indifferent to American and English developments.) The contents of the latest number give one a sense of how undogmatic *MicroMega*'s approach is and how lively it can be. Among its translations are Leo Strauss's important 1950 article on Heidegger (imagine that in *The Nation* or *Dissent*!) and a bare-knuckled debate between Perry Anderson and Carlo Ginzburg over the historian's task. Several articles concern the recent war in Kuwait, which *MicroMega* had supported. There are some replies here to the editors' position, but also a stinging rebuke to the pacifist culture of the left, titled "Pacifism is a Nihilism." More interesting still are two articles by German writers who chronicle the hysterical irrationality of the Germans and the cowardice of their government leaders as the war developed.

With pieces such as these, and a lead article titled "The Seven Mortal Sins of the Greens' Culture," *MicroMega* is hardly a predictable magazine of the left. The happy fact is that, apart from the occasional foray into the back-alley fights of party politics, the editors have managed to catapult their magazine from Italian parochialism into the class of the most

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important European intellectual reviews. This not only makes for good reading: it also provides a more distanced and impartial vantage point from which to consider Italy's political prospects and those of Europe as a whole. As its title suggests, *MicroMega* is more loyal to Voltaire than to Gramsci, and if forced to choose it prefers *la ragione* to *la sinistra*.

The differences between *MicroMega* and *Cuore* are not simply those between a serious intellectual review and a satire rag. They represent two opposing attitudes toward the tradition of the left and two alternative visions of Italy's intellectual and political future. The editors of *MicroMega* seem to understand that Italy has already missed several rendezvous with modernity, thanks to foreign invaders, the Church, Fascism, and Communism. And they seem aware that the *partitocrazia* is not the only barrier to modernization, but that it is aided and abetted by the intellectuals' nostalgia for *la sinistra*. Whether it persists in calling itself "left" is immaterial; what matters is that *MicroMega* has finally brought a modern voice to the baroque and parochial conversation of Italian intellectuals. *Cuore*, on the other hand, is funny – very funny indeed. But one puts it down with the disquieting impression that its readers are laughing themselves back to the Middle Ages.

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DANIEL A. SHANAHAN

Freud and Individualism

Freud once said:

> In later years I denied myself the great pleasure of reading Nietzsche's later works, with the conscious motive of not wishing to be hindered in the working out of my psychoanalytic impressions by any preconceived ideas.

The parallels between Freud and Nietzsche are indeed amazing. Both developed theories of psychological functioning based on notions such as the following: repressed drives foster diseases of the mind; instincts make themselves felt no matter how forcefully they are suppressed; and man's task is to give suppressed instincts expression in ways that will allow him a richer, fuller life. The list is all but endless. However, Freud's remark about Nietzsche is more important for the dissimilarities it suggests between the two men; for dissimilarity is the key to understanding how Freud and Nietzsche, for all the correspondence in their thought, represent two highly contrasting psychologies.

By his own account, Freud wanted to remain free of presuppositions and biases as he explored the mind, and instinct told him that the bulk of Nietzsche's work – nonempirical work – covered the ground he would explore sooner or later; in deference to scientific objectivity, Freud "denied" himself "the great pleasure of reading Nietzsche's works." Few phrases could present the contrast between the style of these two men more graphically than Freud's "deny myself" and "preconceived ideas." For Nietzsche, all truth was steeped in subjectivity. But Freud was convinced that man must distance himself from *himself* in order to achieve the limited happiness available to him in life; he believed that the only way to develop distance in human nature was to adopt a ruthless objectivity and an absolute faithfulness to the scientific method. In other words, attitude, style, and approach distinguish Freud and Nietzsche; they also go a long way toward demonstrating how Freud represents a new climate of anti-individualism in much the same way that Nietzsche represents an older, individualistic school of thought.

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Freud's anti-individualism may not be apparent at first glance. What is clear, however, is his lack of interest in the specifics of individual personality in comparison to his aim of developing a generalized picture of man's mind. Freud was always predisposed toward the inductive side of psychology: Once he had deduced the psychological roots of a patient's symptoms, he could not resist asking how his findings could contribute to a generalized model of the mind. Based on what he saw in individual patients as he treated them, Freud hoped to work out a dynamic psychological topography which would make psychical dysfunctionality as accessible to treatment as physical disease. Perhaps one of the most dramatic demonstrations of Freud's preoccupation with the theoretical side of his studies came late in his life, at a meeting of the International Psychoanalytic Conference, when he rose and spoke personally against follow-up studies which assessed the long-range effects of psychoanalytic treatment. Such studies, he felt, might jeopardize faith in the model and the technique which had been so painstakingly developed over the years, and he was not willing to let a test of practical effectiveness weigh in the balance against a theory which, Freud was confident, represented the mind and its workings accurately.

Freud's neglect, if it can be called that, of practical and individual needs and concerns in favor of the more theoretical aspects of psychoanalysis has drawn a great deal of criticism. Since his death, as result-oriented approaches to therapy have given rise to a brand of psychoanalysis with a strong bent toward existentalism, Freud's model is frequently faulted for reflecting too much theory and too little therapy. However, more important for this discussion is the way in which Freud's nonindividualistic, theoretical interests suggest an attitude about the individual which is basic to the model of the psyche he finally developed. For what becomes clear in even a cursory reading of Freud is that psychoanalysis is an anti-individualistic therapy: It harbors undisguised suspicions about the nature of the total individual, and it sees as its "mission" the reversal of extreme individualism, the destruction of extreme self-absorption, and the establishment of psychic distance between the individual and his self-image. What psychoanalysis does, in effect, is to draw the patient back a step from himself, not simply because distance is a virtue in itself, but because the very nature of the self – ego, id, and superego interacting together – is at best highly unreliable and at worst highly destructive. Basically, not only are Freud and the psychoanalytic world he fathered anti-narcissist, but they also are highly skeptical about the nature of man.

Like his apparent preoccupation with theory, Freud's skepticism is the subject of much criticism. Critics often remark that Freud's pathological focus biased him against human behavior and blinded him to the more optimistic aspects of human nature. Certainly this criticism is

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not unfounded: Freud was a pathologist who studied aberrant behavior as a way of gaining insight into normality. Whether he allowed for the coloration this one-sidedness would give his work is questionable. Freud's circumspection about the nature of man's innermost being was undisguised, though he managed to keep it from becoming outright cynicism. And Freud's pessimism was rooted in his basic assumptions about man's evolution and the evolution of human consciousness – assumptions that bear heavily both on his view of the individual and the slant that view gave to psychoanalysis.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud develops a picture of how consciousness must have come into being. He speculates that an organism susceptible to stimuli must once have existed in a simplified form of undifferentiated matter, but that, with time, the barrage of stimuli the organism received would have forced its surface to become differentiated as a crust, a buffer that would serve as an organ for receiving stimuli. Finally, Freud says, this crust

> would at last have been so thoroughly "baked through" by stimulation that it would present the most favorable conditions for the reception of stimuli . . . it would have become capable of giving rise to consciousness.

However compelling this explanation may be, one cannot help but notice the conservative cast Freud's theory gives to man's origins. Freud not only excludes – or at least neglects – the explanation Nietzsche would give (that consciousness sprang spontaneously from an inherent reaching out), but he makes the evolution of consciousness an ultra-Darwinian event: Man is ultimately nothing more than a sophisticated cortical response to reality, and his nature is thus thoroughly determined by that reality.

Freud's theory of life's origins remained conservative because he never fully pursued and developed the optimistic intuitions about human nature (such as the concept of Eros) that forced their way past his somber circumspection. Unlike Nietzsche, he rarely talked about how higher and higher forms of energy might be derived from lower forms. Instead, he tended to focus on how lower forms were twisted and distorted by stimuli, and on how such distortion caused deep disturbances in personality. For Freud, man's striving for higher goals was an adaptive, rather than a transcendent feature.

Keeping in mind this conservatism about the origins and nature of consciousness, one can easily understand the deeper mistrust Freud felt about the moral potential in human nature itself: An organism that has

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formed its characteristic attributes solely as a reaction to the world around it cannot be expected to be rational and cogent about transcendent values. Faced with overwhelming stimuli from without, and a moral dilemma within, man would always succumb to his instinctive animality and become a reactive organism, highly susceptible to massive and sudden stimuli that could send him into neurotic and even psychotic paralysis.

For Freud, psychoanalysis offered man an escape from his reactive and defensive corner, but it did not redeem him; it merely allowed him to cope. As he put it in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929):

> It is no wonder if, under the pressure of these possibilities of suffering, a man thinks himself happy merely to have escaped unhappiness or to have survived his suffering, and if in general the task of avoiding suffering pushes that of obtaining pleasure into the background. Happiness, in the reduced sense in which we recognize it as possible, is a problem of the economics of the individual's libido.

It is no accident that Freud chose a metaphor with conservative economic overtones for psychic survival, as he was a conservative nineteenth-century skeptic. But the now commonplace criticism of Freud's work as limited by Victorian and Viennese middle-class values seems to me to oversimplify the complex roots of Freud's real prejudices.

Freud's approach to metapsychology – the mapping out and description of the dynamics of the mind – was unashamedly mechanistic. He began his career as a neurologist, and his move to psychology and metapsychology was premised on the strict materialist belief that all consciousness had its roots in biological processes. In 1914 he wrote:

> We must all recollect that all our provisional ideas in psychology will some day be based on an organic substructure. . . . This makes it probable that special substances and special chemical processes control the operation of sexuality and provide for the continuation of the individual life in that of the species.

Freud's understanding of chemistry and physics was nineteenth-century and Helmholzian: He believed that the mind and its chemical processes could be examined, isolated, and described in much the same way that one could examine, understand, and describe the workings of a steam engine. Freud also saw energy – as did Helmholz – in conservative and capitalistic terms: as something to be conserved and "invested" wisely, not as something that was created and liberated by action – a Nietzschean and Einsteinian approach. Thus, Freud not only reflected

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the physics of his time, he reflected much of its social conservatism. He saw the energies of the mind as something to be exploited and controlled in a methodical and energy-conserving fashion. He also shared, as we shall see, the conservative skepticism that pervaded modern society.

What Freud did not share was the relatively uncritical attitude of conservative nineteenth-century politics and economics. Freud was relentlessly self-critical in his work, one could almost say too self-critical, in that his view of his own work was tinged with skepticism and often kept him from making imaginative leaps. But for all his self-awareness (or perhaps because of it), Freud remained conservative in his attitude toward the individual; he was fundamentally unsure that the rational side of man could ever relax its grip once it achieved dominance over the passionate, instinctual side. Thus, he saw the individual not as a source of values but as a source of resistance to them.

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud's doubts about the individual ring their loudest and most characteristic note. The entire work is an attempt to discover the extent to which men can achieve instinctual satisfaction by uniting with other men and gaining control over some of the suffering that is their common lot. Freud calls this binding together "civilization." But he is deeply pessimistic about the civilizing process, and the reasons for that pessimism lie, again, in his view of the psyche. Where Marx would argue that man is a social animal who has not yet fully recognized the need for a truly social – and therefore cooperative – approach to existence, Freud claims just the opposite: Man is first and foremost subject to his individual instinctual demands, and men have entered into a social mode of living purely as a means of extending survival. But it is a means with a price.

At one point in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, citing the need for adversaries to unite a people in a common cause, Freud remarks:

> . . . it is intelligible that the attempt to establish a new, communist civilization in Russia should find its psychological support in the persecution of the bourgeois.

And at another point he says:

> I have no concern with any economic criticisms of the communist system. . . . But I am able to recognize that the psychological premises on which the system is based are an untenable illusion. In abolishing private property we deprive the human love of aggression of one of its instruments, certainly a strong one, though certainly not the strongest: but we have in no way altered the difference in power

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> and influence which are misused by aggressiveness, nor have we altered anything in its nature. Aggressiveness was not created by property.

Not only are these thoughtful criticisms, they also reveal the basis for the underlying skepticism Freud felt about civilization. First, Freud was absolutely convinced that man was an aggressive animal and that any attempt to curb human aggression was bound to produce frustration. For Freud, civilization merely increased the level of each individual's frustration by forcing him to moderate his most powerful interest: the individual's preoccupation with himself and his own drives.

Freud would have seen in socialism's optimism about man nothing more than a new narcissism, a carefully disguised, but virtually unchanged form of self-interest which persisted in ignoring fundamental truths about human nature. Earlier, in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud had said that groups were built on a foundation of widespread and binding attachment to a leader. Although he does not refer specifically to socialism in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud would have explained socialism in much the same way: Large numbers of people waive their right to instinctual demands and attach themselves to a leader – in this case the idea of economic justice replaces the leader – and they experience their own narcissism, or self-love, vicariously through the illusion that this ideal favors them especially.

Narcissism is a pivotal concept in Freud's model of man because it lies at the heart of his approach to human behavior, and it also brings into focus the true nature of Freud's anti-individualism. He saw the human infant beginning in a state of indifference to the world around him, vacillating between the peace of infant sleep and the vague and generally unpleasant sensations of waking life. But when the infant's interest in the outside world began to emerge, Freud saw a stage during which preference for the self – narcissism – provided the infant's budding consciousness with the first, and for a time, the only reference for sensation. Indeed, all stimuli were seen as an extension of the self during the narcissistic stage. For Freud, narcissism constituted the first development of human consciousness, and it was through his study of "absolute, primary narcissism" that most of his ideas about libido were formed.

If all went well, Freud said, an infant moved gradually through the narcissistic stage and began to recognize, with greater and greater accuracy, where the self left off and otherness began. However, trauma could prevent the child from moving on to the recognition of otherness, or it could send him back to a narcissistic mode later in life. Both occurred when the trauma was serious enough to make the individual fear change and growth. In young and old alike, trauma could trigger a return to

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"absolute, primary narcissism"; "narcissistic regression" was what Freud called this reversion to the earliest stages of consciousness, and he considered it a mental dysfunction, a neurosis.

Narcissistic neurosis was the physical dysfunction least accessible to psychoanalytic cure, but for both narcissistic neuroses and transference neuroses (which were accessible to psychoanalytic treatment), Freud's remedy was the same: Psychic distance had to be put between the patient and the disturbance that caused his symptoms. Freud felt that the psychoanalyst must educate the patient in distanced, dispassionate self-awareness if the patient were to understand the neurosis and see it to a satisfactory resolution.

This intense polarity in the relationship between narcissism and psychoanalysis demonstrates the primary emphasis of the psychoanalytic technique: Freud saw psychoanalysis as a tool for growth through demystification of the psyche and greater familiarity with its workings. His pessimism about human nature did not keep Freud from remaining adamant in his contention that human behavior must be drawn out of the shadow of mystery and superstition and brought into the light of careful scientific scrutiny. Above all, Freud felt, a psychoanalyst must be an educator; he must uncover the depths of the human psyche for the uneducated and thereby dispel the uncertainty and ignorance that surrounded it.

The tool Freud created to achieve the demystification of the self, psychoanalysis, has, as many of its critics have pointed out, a normative model of man. It favors the development of generalized human traits, not particularized ones. Psychoanalysis stressed form, partly as a way of creating a structured set of references which man could use to secure a firm hold on the self. But the normative and formalistic approach which psychoanalysis inherited from Freud is really only a superficial characteristic of one of Freud's deepest and most influential predispositions, his belief in science and the scientific method. As we have seen, Freud was trained as a scientist; he began his career as a neurologist, and he carried over the empirical, naturalistic, even materialistic predispositions of his scientific training into his psychoanalytic research. But while commentators are willing to recognize that Freud saw himself as a scientist and attempted to uphold the scientific method throughout his career, there seems to be some hedging as to whether Freud actually was a scientist.

Freud's scientific attitude is important to us in that it represents an attitude characteristic of his approach, and, when applied to the notion of the self, is characteristic of a whole trend, and a dominant one at that, in modern thought. As Erich Fromm put it:

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> Freud's total approach to man was part – and perhaps the culmination – of the most important trend in Western thought since the seventeenth century: the attempt to grasp and be in touch with reality, and to rid man of illusions which veil and distort reality. . . . The natural sciences, crowned by the new insights into the nature of matter, constitute another attack with the same aim . . . they are the expression of the passionate outburst of Western man's desire to relinquish false gods, to do away with illusions and to grasp himself and the world as part of a total reality. This is the aim of science. . . .

We might call Freud the "maturation" of science rather than the "culmination," but the accuracy of Fromm's statement speaks for itself. Freud's precursors are those who made unrelenting attempts to see the world free of unproven biases, taking their evidence from experience and weighing it without recourse to *a priori* explanations or mystical truth. Da Vinci, one of the precursors Freud took time to study in depth, is a case in point: Sitting at his desk, dissecting corpses at night, or sketching birds in the afternoon sky, Leonardo was the preeminent example of a man whose eye could detect the subtleties of the physical world and whose mind could deduce the causes and induce natural laws from those causes. Freud was more predisposed to detecting the subtleties of personality than he was at perceiving the laws of physics. One might prefer to credit his vision to a "mind's eye," but he was nonetheless convinced that his observations were as demonstrably accurate and naturalistically determined as Leonardo's. And we have a particular instance of that belief that is worth a closer look.

In 1895, when he had not yet immersed himself in psychoanalytic research exclusively, Freud spent a "feverish" four months writing what became known as "A Project for a Scientific Psychology." In this paper, which predates *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) by five years, Freud hoped to develop a neurological explanation of all mental processes, "from the details of neurosis to the conditions that make consciousness possible." Freud finally abandoned the "Project," and the work has rarely been taken seriously by later commentators; Daniel Yankelovich and William Barrett, for instance, characterize it as "an abortive effort, quickly abandoned."

However, a recent assessment of the "Project" by Karl Pribram and Merton Gill (1976) makes two interesting – and for our purposes, invaluable – points. First, a reassessment of the "Project" shows that it "contains early conceptions of processes which in many instances anticipate by years the later formulations made not only by Freud but by other psychologists and neurologists." Freud's provisions for memory, his system of "contact barriers" necessary to allow choice, and his notion of

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a "feed-back" mechanism as a device for correcting errors have all found support in the neurological research of the last twenty-five years. But even more important for our discussion is the fact that, according to Pribam and Gill:

> many terms used throughout that part of psychoanalytic theory which deals with mechanism are given operative definitions in the Project. As these usually involve neurological as well as behavioral referents, the document is, in a sense, a Rosetta stone for those interested in making communication between these realms of discourse possible.

In other words, the basis of much of what later became psychoanalytic theory sprang from an earlier, neurological theory, one which came at a moment when, as Freud put it in a letter to Fleiss (1895), "the barriers were lifted, and the veil was drawn aside."

Whether or not we agree that intuition and inspiration allow us to see through "veils" to a "clear" vision, we can, I think, safely assume that such a moment at least reveals the deepest attitudes of the inspired. During this, a very important moment in the development of what was to become psychoanalysis, Freud writes to Fleiss:

> Everything seemed to connect up. The whole worked well together, and one had the impression that the thing was now really a machine and would soon go by itself. The three systems of neurones, the free and bound state of Quantity, the primary and secondary processes, the main tendency and the compromise tendency of the nervous system, the two biological laws of attention and defense, the indications of Quality, Reality, and determinant of repression, and finally the necessary conditions for consciousness as a function of perception: all that was perfectly clear, and still is. Naturally, I don't know how to contain myself for pleasure.

Here we see Freud at his best and as himself: the avid scientist, firm in his conviction that psychical phenomena had a clear neurological basis, determined to take individual insights and assemble them into a unified, comprehensive picture that would tell man more about himself and draw him further out of the shadows of superstition than he had ever been before. At bottom, Freud's insistence on the scientific verifiability of his work was yet another reflection of his antinarcissism. Science and psychoanalysis were synonymous, Freud believed, because both allowed man to verify his perceptions of what he saw around and inside him.

Yet at the same time, the story of the "Project" reveals the short-

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comings of Freud's antinarcissism. For while, thanks to Freud's scientific attitude, psychoanalysis offers man a set of references which draw him away from self-immersion into a world where cause and effect supersede mystical beliefs, it was that same attitude (or perhaps an exaggeration of it) which led Freud to abandon the "Project" as too hypothetical, too subjective, or perhaps even too narcissistic. Barely five weeks after his first letter to Fleiss he wrote:

> I can no longer understand the state of mind in which I hatched the psychology; cannot conceive how I could have inflicted it on you . . . to me it appears to have been a kind of madness.

As Pribram and Gill have demonstrated, the "Project" was hardly the product of a kind of madness. It was, in fact, the product of an intuition which had, we now know, a high level of verifiability. But so intense was Freud's antinarcissism that he allowed it to blind him to the accuracy of the insights the "Project" represented. A thinker of profound intuitive capabilities, Freud was nonetheless so deeply mistrustful of the unverified intuitive insight that he preferred to repress such insights – as he did with the whole of Nietzsche's work – rather than risk what he saw as the inviolability of scientific thinking. Ironically, such attempts may in the end have been self-defeating. As Pribram and Gill remark:

> . . . it would have been better for Freud to have published the Project and then set it aside rather than let it fester unseen to degenerate into untestable metaphor that repeatedly and unpredictably bursts to the surface in later theorizing.

Had Freud allowed himself a greater receptivity to inspirations such as the "Project," he might have developed a more balanced, less pessimistic model of man. He certainly would have established firmer ground for psychoanalysis's claim to status as a science, had he pursued the intuitions on which the "Project" was based. But more importantly, he might have learned to see the intuitive and transcendent sides of human nature, not as aberrations or illusions, but as phenomena with as much to tell us about man as neurosis.

Probably the greatest lesson we have to learn from the rise of psychoanalysis is the fact that man's self-absorbed style of action can no longer be considered an effective way of dealing with the problems life throws his way. Man must get outside of himself, recognize where self ends and otherness begins, and set himself to the task of understanding

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how he can best stand in relation to that otherness. We may, of course, find that it takes some prodding, even severe prodding at times, to get man to relinquish his hold on his mythologies and his romantic idealisms, but if man is a little stubborn we need not let that color our overall estimate of his growth. Man has, after all, developed the attitudes which will allow him to move on and grow, and it is his own being that issues the strongest, clearest call for change.

Man may never completely free his perceptions from the effects of his thoughts and emotions; science is just beginning to accept the fact that we change the nature of what we observe merely by observing it. But for the moment, and perhaps for centuries to come, our species seems intent on exercising its observation and objectivity and exorcising its needs and fears from as many of those observations as possible. We can only applaud these attempts. For by demystifying the nature of his own being and extricating himself from absorption in that being, man draws his attention away from that alluring image reflected in the pool and feels himself exploring the world his self-preoccupation has kept him from seeing. In time the process of demystification and discovery may open man's eyes to the existence of others who, like him, have lived for centuries in the caves of their individual existences, chained to the walls of their own selves, and who now grope tentatively for a hand to hold as they approach the light of day.

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TATYANA TOLSTOYA

Serafim

"Go away! Go awaaay, you lousy beast!"

Someone's dog, white, matted, disgusting, not only jumped into the elevator after Serafim, whimpered, its paws pacing the dim, clunking box racing up toward the sixteenth floor, but dared to rush to the apartment, scratching insistently at the padding of the door while Serafim struggled with the keys on the landing.

"Get out of here!"

Serafim was squeamish about nudging the warm brute with his clean foot. The dog was possessed by a frightful impatience: it drummed at the door, quickly wedged its nose to the crack and snuffed the air, drummed again, insisted, would not be dissuaded.

Serafim stamped his foot and yelled – useless. He tried to trick the animal by swiftly pushing his way into the apartment, but, shuddering and wriggling like a furry snake, the filthy cur slithered in with hideous speed, rubbing against Serafim's legs in the process, and ran around the dark room, its claws clicking. Serafim squealed, grabbed a mop, overtook the dog, struck it, struck it again, kicked it out, slammed the door, and with a pounding heart collapsed against the frame. The fiend of hell quietly fluttered about on the landing, circling and rustling. It left.

His legs could still feel the revolting sensation of dog flesh slinking by. He felt nauseated.

Serafim lay against the door, calming himself down. Better now? Almost.

Leave me alone. What do you all want from me? I don't want anyone. I am separate. Higher. I descended from the starry fields to this filth, and when I've completed my earthly circle, I'll go back to where I came from. Don't touch me.

Serafim took off his coat, drank a glass of cold, clean water, lit two candles, sat down in front of the mirror and took a look at himself. Handsome. He narrowed his eyes appraisingly, threw back his head, observed from the side – excellent! That's me. Uncommonly fine! That's – me! Mind your own business, all of you. He remembered the dog. Disgusting beast. He jumped up in horror and glanced at his trousers – just

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as he thought – fur. Get rid of it immediately! A hot shower! He sat down at the mirror again.

. . . What a vile world. Women, children, old people, dogs . . Yellow, heaving swill. Flesh is nauseating. The flesh of others is nauseating. Only what's mine is ravishing, pure, transparent. I am fleshless and sexless. I don't play your games. Get your muck out of here.

Serafim looked into the dark mirror. On both sides of the glass was a pure, living flame. Heavenly countenance. Candles! Heavenly countenance. But only I am permitted to admire this marvelous, inhuman sight! Turn your nasty faces away from me!

To go to work Serafim was obliged to ride the bus. He tried not to look at the swinish snouts, the camellike muzzles, the hippopotamus cheeks. People are all vile! And all of them, base, revolting, are staring at Serafim with bug eyes, grinning their grins. Yes, I am magnificent! Yes, my face shines with an unworldly light! Yes, golden curls! Snow-white wings! Angelic eyes! Part, crowd! Stand aside – Serafim goes here!

He looked in the mirror once more. Serafim's countenance swam up from the dark depths, wavering in the warm flame. A rosy glow, the reflected light of white wings behind his back. To gaze forever . . . Who are you, my beauty? Serafim sank into the divine reflection. Time to go to bed. Tomorrow would be a hard day. He blew out the flames, folded his wings together, and hung in the soft twilight.

For the Montgolfier brothers' jubilee, the district was planning a mass flight of thirty kilometers. Serafim was also participating. He had to collect various papers: a bilirubin blood test, a general urine analysis, and a certificate of residency. "I'll fly higher than all of them," thought Serafim while the nurse drew his delicate blue blood through a tube. "Higher than the crowd, higher than the human throng, higher than their base passions. I, a child of the ether, will spread my blinding, silky, snow-white wings like a million white humming birds. Oh, how magnificent my triumphant flight will be!"

He strolled leisurely along the drying spring path, carrying his curly golden head high. The quacking word ZHEK – the housing office – squatted on a brown plaque. Get the residency certificate.

He pushed open the door and entered. Two old ladies were asleep in a room without curtains furnished with rows of chairs. A middle-aged lecturer slowly read from a notebook covered with oilcloth:

"According to the absolutely apocryphal legend, god-the-father, who doesn't exist, supposedly fertilized the so-called virgin Mary by way of the non-existent holy spirit; the result of this fraudulent conception, according to the mendacious allegations of the clergymen, was the mythical figure of Christ, who is totally alien to us. These unfounded fabrications . . . "

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The old ladies woke up.

"Come in, come in, Serafim!" cried the lecturer. "Today we're having an anti-Easter lecture on the evil of the so-called immaculate conception. Have a seat, it'll do you good to listen!"

Serafim looked at him coldly, slammed the door and left. I'm against any kind of conception. Fight, lecturer. Fight. Eradicate it. I'm above human beings, above their fables about vulgar gods giving birth to idiot infants in dirty cow sheds. I am pure spirit, I am Serafim!

At the store "Woodland Gifts" they had pigeons. Serafim took a pair. Simmer in a covered pot for up to an hour and a half.

The pigeons bubbled in the pot. The doorbell rang. So. It's Magda, his neighbor. She wants to get married. She visits Serafim under various pretexts, the red-headed scourge! Serafim folded his arms and began looking out the window, began to heat up. Magda sat down on the edge of the chair, her legs under it, she never knows where to put her hands. She likes Serafim. Vile thing! "Khhem . . "

She's thinking about how to start. She glances around the kitchen.

"You're boiling a chicken?"

"Yes."

"Khhem."

Silence.

"I bought some pork too, you know, a fairly large piece, well, I mean, about three pounds, I kept looking at it, thinking, should I take it or shouldn't I, but I did; I thought I'd bake it or something. I stood on line a long time; when I got home and unwrapped it – all fat! All fat!"

Fat is nauseating muck. The whole world of flesh – is fat. Fatty, sticky children, fatty old ladies, fatty red-headed Magda.

"Ahem. I thought, maybe, I could do some washing for you, dirty sheets or whatever. You live alone."

Go away you nauseating creature. Go away, don't soil my clean, clear, mountain spirit with your swinish hands. Go away.

She went away.

Serafim threw out the pigeons, drank a cup of clear broth. A pure, lean bird.

There. Get the results of the blood test; one last humiliation – and upward! To the stars! Serafim knew the results beforehand: no traces of filth, nothing lowly, denigrating or shameful would be detected. Not like these others!

Serafim got on the bus. People pressed in. Careful there, those are wings!

"You should take taxis," said a woman. But she looked at Serafim's luminous face – and smiled. Get away, you base thing!

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He made his way to the middle. Someone touched one wing with a finger. Stung, he turned around. A small boy, hideous looking – glasses, crossed eyes, no front teeth – was looking at Serafim's luxurious, swan-like feathering. His whole body winced: the snotty freak! . . . with dirty hands!

Yes and here's the result of the blood test: aqua distillata (sic!). What did you think it would be? . . . Swine!

The day was ending. The sweaty din, sticky dirt, stench, the human swarm – everything was loaded onto wagons and carted away. The deep blue evening, brandishing a broom, nodded to Serafim as it advanced from the east. A gentle silvery sheen set in on high. On the emptying streets each black silhouette was individually underlined. Swinish snouts dared to smile at Serafim, to look into his face. "Annihilate them all," thought Serafim. "Incinerate every one of them. Yes, my face shines. Not for you! How dare you look!"

By the time he approached his building, it was completely dark. A temptingly empty bench. I'll have a breath of fresh air. And tomorrow – the flight!

He spread his wings, looked upward. The starry wheel turns slowly, slowly. Berenice's Hair, Virgo, the Herdsman, the Hunting Dogs – clean, cold, April diamonds. That was the place for Serafim. A sexless, shining body, he would glide in silvery raiment through the resonant heights, let the streaming cold of the constellations run between his fingers, dive into ethereal currents. Dling Dling! – the starry threads jingled like the strings of a harp. He would drink his fill of the clean, sparkling bubbles of the twenty-star Cup . . . And burn up the filthy earth. He'd pluck out the double, transfusing star from the Hunting Dogs constellation – the Heart of Charles . . . And he'd scorch the earth with fire.

Behind the bench, in the thick, bare bushes, something rustled, crackled, yapped – the white dog ran out, spun around, waved its tail, jumped on Serafim's lap – joyfully, joyfully, as if it had found a long lost friend. It jumped about noisily, trying to lick his face.

Serafim fell from the sky, jerked away, screamed, thrust out his arms. The dog jumped back, sat on it hind legs, tilted its head and looked at Serafim endearingly. From the sight of the affectionate muzzle and dark dog eyes, something hot and dirty rose in his chest, filled his throat. Silently, gritting his teeth, trembling, hating, Serafim moved toward the dog. It didn't understand and was overjoyed, wagged its tail, grinned, and ran to meet him. Serafim kicked at the dog's eyes with his heel, lost his footing, kicked, kicked, kicked! There we go.

He stood for awhile. The dog lay stretched out. Quiet. The stars dripped. A woman's voice called:

"Sha-arik, Sharik, Sharik! . . . Sha-aaaarinka, Sharinka, Sharinka! . . "

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"The same for you," thought Serafim. "Stamp out everyone." Trying not to make any noise with his wings, he quickly moved toward the building.

He slept badly that night. His jaw bones ached. He awoke at dawn, and felt his alarmingly changed palate with his tongue. Something was wrong. He yawned – and had difficulty opening his mouth. Everything had somehow become different. Something's in the way. It had gotten colder. He wiped his face with his hand and looked – blood: he'd cut his palm on the end of his nose. The mirror! From the white morning murk, from the oval frame someone was looking out at Serafim: a red, horny beak; a low forehead covered with blue-grey scales; from the mouth, the edges of a narrow slit, two large, long milk-white fangs. Serafim looked coldly into the frame. He ran the split tongue along the fangs. They're strong. He looked at the clock: "Off to the dentist. The private doctor. There's time before the flight."

Tap tap tap went his claws on the asphalt. Faster – tap, tap tap tap tap . . .

"The monster Serpent Gorynych!" shouted some boys. "Look there's Serpent Gorynych!"

Serafim tucked his coat tight around him, grabbed his wide black wings, and took off at a run – the bus had already rounded the corner.

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NORMAN MANEA

Proust's Tea

The people crowding outside the big, heavy, wooden doors, curious about the spectacle, were perhaps themselves travelers, or their companions, or loiterers of the sort often found in train stations, but on that afternoon not one of them was allowed into the waiting room. Nor could they see what was going on inside. The windows were too high, the rectangular glass panes in the doors too dirty and clouded with steam.

The waiting room was immense; it was hard to imagine anything bringing it to life; everything got lost, swallowed up in it. Crouched over their bundles, people in rags were huddling one on top of the other in clusters from the walls all the way to the center, filling up the room. The din was unending.

Shrill and desperate voices, hoarse voices, sometimes deep moans, grew suddenly louder when the nurses came by. The white uniforms barely managed to squeeze through the tangle of legs and bodies. Hands rose up all around to grab hold of the hems, the sleeves, even the shoulders, necks, and arms of these fine ladies. People were screaming, begging, groaning, cursing. Some were crying, especially those who were too far away and had lost all hope of getting a packet of food and a cup.

Those crowded on the other side of the wood and thick glass doors would have tried in vain to guess ages and sexes from the faces on the mass of skeletons, dressed in rags tied with string, that crammed into the waiting room. The women all looked like old, wretched convicts, and children with oversized skulls popped up all around them like apocalyptic men, compressed, stunted, as if an instrument of torture had shrunk them all.

The nurses knew, of course, that there were no men in the waiting room, nor young women. Had they understood the cries and the wailing around them, they would have realized that it was this very absence that aggravated the panic: the rescued did not understand, nor did they want to accept, that they had been saved. They suspected that this was a new

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ruse, even more diabolical, that would undoubtedly lead to new tortures, perhaps even to the end. Why else had the men and able-bodied young women been left behind? To bring them here later, on another train? Because there hadn't been enough room? Perhaps someone had objected to piling them on top of one another?

They could have done without those big, luxurious railway cars that swayed like imperial barges . . . They wouldn't have minded traveling in carts, walking for miles and miles, so long as they'd been allowed to stay together, husbands, wives, sisters, sons and daughters, the old and the children, all of them.

Shorn like the others, her head covered by some sort of burlap hood, the woman before whom the nurse had stopped was ageless like the rest. She made no sound. She had not said a word when the person next to her had taken from her hands a piece of blanket and covered herself with it. She didn't flinch when the old woman on her left, sensing in her silence a confirmation of her own foreboding, became excited, raising her arms to the sky. Finally she lifted her head: a face shrunken, withered, old, like a Phoenician mask. But she didn't move, not even when the nurse passed by. She just kept watching, intense, like the midget resting its small yellowish head on her bare shoulder.

The air in the room quivered with heat. The continuous pulsing rumble of the mass lowered the ceiling and pulled the walls in closer. The hall had shrunk. Everything was happening close to the ground, at the height of the crowd. Only when you threw your head back and looked up did the ceiling recede, like a soaring, ever more unreachable sky. From the heights, the noise lagged, distant, weak, somewhere down below. Those who remained on the ground were deafened by it, drained by fear, oblivious to everything.

She, too, couldn't stop thinking about what might be happening on the train that never arrived. She couldn't have been allowed on board, she knew all too well that she looked like an old woman, no one would have believed that she was not yet thirty. But then she would have had no reason to want to be on the train for men and young women. Surely she too had seen how they had clung to each other without shame – my father and my cousin – the moment they left the lineup. She did not look at them, but without a doubt she had seen everything. Disciplined, she had joined her column, holding in her limp hand the hand of the midget trailing behind her. She didn't even yank at his arm as she helped him climb the high steps onto the train. She saw that the child, when he reached the top of the steps, had turned his wrinkled face toward the two who were left on the platform, sitting on the bench too close to each other. But the woman had not said a word; she sat down on the seat in the train and closed her eyes, exhausted.

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Perhaps the commotion of so many confused voices coming from down below overwhelmed her, allowed her to forget, but suddenly she had turned around, pushing against the little midget's scrawny neck and dislodging him from his nest. In any event, her bony, dampish shoulder could not replace, even in the child's memory or dreams, the plump, fresh cheeks of the pillow he craved.

The hands that touched the neck and the matchstick arms of the little savage were those of the lady in the white uniform. The lady was smiling at the little midget, bending over him, the red cross on her forehead shining, coming nearer. She held out the bag of biscuits and the tin cup.

The cup was hot. The little beast's cheeks bent over the yellowish, liquid circle, into the fragrant steam. A pleasure that could not last; a pleasure one should not dare prolong, no matter what happiness one felt. An impossible pleasure, but real, because the hall was real too, and buzzing, and he heard the bag being ripped open over his head, and his hand filled with biscuits.

The boy sipped, numb with pleasure, frightened. He understood that everything was real and, therefore, that it would end; it was he, giddy with delight, who impatiently hastened its end. The cup was half emptied. He stopped drinking and looked at the stubby, fat biscuits in the palm of his hand. He began to nibble, patiently, on one of the grainy, sweet, scallop-edged shells. Only then did he feel hunger. He grabbed the bag with one hand. In the other he held the cup. He shoved a fistful of biscuits into his mouth. A little midget who inspired tenderness however ghastly he looked, and so the lady put an extra bag in his mother's hand.

"Drink the tea also. Drink, while it's still hot."

Perhaps the souls of those we've lost do indeed take refuge in inanimate objects. They remain absent until the moment they feel our presence nearby and call out to us for recognition, to free them from death. Perhaps, indeed, the past cannot be brought back on command, but is resurrected only by that strange, spontaneous sensation we feel when unexpectedly we come across the smell, the taste, the flavor of some inert accessory from the past.

But the aroma of that heavenly drink could not be reminiscent of anything; he had never experienced such pleasure. This magic potion could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called "tea."

So it was necessary to look up toward the sky of dirty stone, where black clouds of flies swarmed, and where he expected Grandfather to appear, the only person who would have had an answer.

They had gathered, as usual, around him, everyone was holding his hot cup of greenish water infused with local herbs picked in those alien places, to which Grandfather would add, whenever he found them, aca-

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cia blossoms.

High up on the arched ceiling of the waiting room, where the light bulbs attracted billows of insects, Grandfather appeared as if on a round screen, and Grandmother, and his parents, and his aunt. They were warming their hands on the steaming cups, all of them staring at the same point high above, in front of them. Anda was there, too, of course. She took part, humble, submissive, but shameless enough, nevertheless, not to miss the tea ritual to which Grandfather summoned everybody, sometimes looking at each person a long time, letting them know that he knew everything about everybody, even about his son-in-law and this beautiful and guilty granddaughter.

Grandfather did not take his eyes off the little white cube of sugar that hung, as usual, from the ceiling lamp. They all had to stare at it intensely for some minutes before sipping the hot water. Those who remembered the taste of sugar, those, that is, who had the time, before the disaster, to accustom their palates to the sweetness of the little white lumps, gradually felt their lips become wet and sticky. The brackish green drink became sweet, good, "real tea," as Grandfather would say.

The ceremony was repeated almost every afternoon, presided over sternly yet not without a touch of humor by the old man, his unkempt beard mottled in black. He was convinced that he would return home, and he conserved as a symbol of that world, and for that world, a dirty sugar cube. While the boiling water was being poured, no one was allowed to look anywhere but in his own cup, and one waited to hear the water splash and bubble in the neighboring cup, until one by one all of them were filled. Then everyone raised his eyes toward the lamp from which a tiny parallelepiped of almost white sugar hung on a string. They had to stare at it patiently for a long time, and had to sip the tea slowly, until everyone felt his lips, tongue, mouth, his entire being refreshed, mellowed by the memory of a world they must not give up, because, Grandfather firmly believed, it had not given them up and could not do without them. The tea steamed in the cups; everyone was silent, all concentrating, as they had been told to, on a small, dirty cube of sugar that Grandfather had had the idea to save and hang up in front of them every day.

Up there, above the din in which the poor wretches tried, uselessly, to return to another life, up there, in an open space, isolated from the huge waiting room, Grandfather, confident in a return that would not come to pass, could have assured them that the magic potion was indeed proof that the world had welcomed them back. But even this strange drink did not remotely resemble "real tea."

"Dunk the biscuits in the tea. Drink it while it's hot."

"Drink while it's hot," repeated now one woman, now another.

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Dunked in the tea, the plump, round biscuits had the very flavor of happiness – had there been time for surrender, utter abandon, a dizzying fullness of feeling, the priceless gifts that only a chosen few can hope to deserve, and that some day must be returned in a miraculous exchange.

The biscuits tasted like soap, mud, rust, burnt skin, snow, leaves, rain, bones, sand, mold, wet wool, sponges, mice, rotting wood, fish, the unique flavor of hunger.

There are, then, certain gifts whose only quality and only flaw is that they cannot be exchanged for anything else. Such gifts cannot, at some later time, be recalled, repossessed, or returned.

If, later, I lost anything, it was precisely the cruelty of indifference. But only later, and with difficulty. Because, much later, I became what is called . . . a feeling being.

Weddings

A town with dusty streets lined by giant, disheveled trees. Sunlight lingered in large, well-tended courtyards. The morning rose slowly; noon hovered, indolent, over the loud, seemingly endless lunch. So many and such unusual courses, slowed down even further by a knife and fork too heavy for the boy's greediness and impatience.

Evenings came swiftly. Families lined up in rows and chairs and benches in front of low white houses, recounting stories about the war until after midnight. The silence of the crystalline sky lent their voices a strange clarity and sadness.

They hadn't moved in yet with their other relatives on the outskirts of the small town. They still lived in the center with the teachers.

Daylight burst suddenly, like an enormous orange balloon pierced by a shaft of light. Joyful young voices animated the main street. Windows flew open at the laughter and singing of the first groups that passed by. A Sunday, sort of fresh and impetuous as there hadn't been before stirred up the calm of the early morning streets. People wandered about, restless, perplexed; met, separated, sought each other out, converged.

It seemed that everyone, lured by the colors and excitement of the street, was outside. The columns of people kept getting bigger, overflowing the sidewalks, advancing in ever denser waves.

Pushed and carried by the crowd, he kept his balance by holding his cousin's hand. The small town rose on a wave of anticipation. Entire

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convoys, compact rows of heads bobbed toward the mark. There he would be giving his speech.

He would have liked to hurl himself into the midst of the exuberant, dancing crowd.

Walking tired him. They still knew nothing about his mission; the secret weighed on him. From all directions the wind carried the sound of loud voices, a deafening chorus. The sun filtered down in lazy rays, giving him vertigo.

His cousin dragged him along, occasionally squeezing his hand to remind him that he was still there. He understood that the boy was defending himself the way he usually did, with apathy. Efforts to make the boy tougher had failed, and finally, exhausted, he had resigned himself to the child's weakness and confusion.

Little by little, methodically, he tried to understand the boy's character. But he did not suspect how accustomed the boy was to withdrawing, as soon as he was figured out, and seeking new hiding places.

For the past month, since his acquisition of so many relatives in this unfamiliar town, the boy had been staying with his cousin, the teacher. A tender refuge, one might have thought, for from the start he cheerfully indulged the curiousity and kindness these people showed him. Soon after his arrival he had succeeded in forgetting the feeling of suffocation that had seized him at times in the past. His hosts were always ready to cheer him up, to please him with some surprise, keep him company.

Thus for almost a week they had prepared him with soothing words for the blue vitriol bath. They convinced him to associate the words "blue vitriol" – words that in fact seemed to belong to a foreign realm – with the miracle of his future growth, his becoming as big and strong as other children his age. The hypocrisy of his garrulous relatives hit him too late. Their deceitful words burned like scalding needles on his red, inflamed flesh. The water was boiling, stinging. His screams were to no avail, they held him down, determined, their tender smiles gone. Eventually, satisfied, they informed him that he was cured of his scabies.

He didn't feel the suffocation then. He felt it in the afternoon when he met with the teacher to rehearse his speech. He had learned to avoid each new trap as it was laid for him. He no longer made the mistake of believing he was secure among his own people. Aloof, indifferent, he observed the smug teacher so trusting in his own intuitions. The sessions with this cousin had turned into a game played by someone else; he no longer had reason to rebel.

Recent confrontations had taught him even more than the incident of the blue vitriol bath. At first he had let himself be deceived by the manly camaraderie – no baby-talk, no hugging – that the teacher seemed

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to be offering. He waited for him, happy, as in a dream. So that it seemed only natural to tell the events of his life in answer to the questions this newfound cousin kept asking him.

"Were you afraid there?"

"Yes, in the evening."

"Did they beat you?"

"Seldom. I hid from them. I wasn't scared of them."

"What scared you, then?"

"The evenings. Beautiful evenings. Fields, fields, stretching as far as the eye could see. Very beautiful evenings."

"Is that what frightened you?"

"Yes. A desert all around. Crows. I don't know. Silence. The fields went on forever. The silence too."

The cousin paused.

"I see. You were terrified by the vastness of it all. And the others?"

"They prayed, they whispered. Some cried. I was alone."

"What was the hardest thing?"

"The food."

The conversations were followed by long walks, during which the teacher found out everything he wanted to know. Sometimes he wrote things in a notebook with a shiny blue cover that he would whisk out from his shirt pocket.

"Did you ever cry?"

"When Grandfather died. He was the closest to me."

"Were there happier days too?"

"Yes, when Mara got sick the first time. They took me to Uncle's so I wouldn't catch it."

The boy paid attention to him as to an older brother; he gave him his full trust. He forgot that the others, too, had walked him to the threshold of friendship, and then suddenly had revealed their true faces. They enjoyed the sight of the extreme suffering of others, it amused them . . . He had forgotten. He didn't have the time to prepare himself and was caught unawares by his cousin's other face.

The speech sounded good; they practiced it every day. It contained everything he had told his cousin, but arranged differently; it was shorter, with new words. "Silence all around," he had said; it became "a vast silence," no great improvement even if he didn't understand it.

Then, suddenly, the teacher became harsh, turned cold and somber like a raven.

"It's no good, it's not good at all! You've got to speak louder! If you don't nobody will hear you. Louder, louder, do you understand?"

This shouting caught him by surprise, paralyzed him. But he quickly found his voice again, hoping to appease the maniac: " . . . our brothers,

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in whose hands we saw a loaf of bread, when we had forgotten what bread looked like. And we say to you, let us not forget, let us not forgive, let us punish those who . . . "

"That's better. Once more now, let's hear it!"

As he grew more daring, the pitch of his voice rose too high, like a squawk. The ruler leaped in the air and landed on the table, crack!

"No, no, no! How many times do I have to tell you? You're lost in the clouds as usual. You're rushing just to get it over with! You must get the right intonation, do you understand? Enunciate, loudly . . . Come on, try it again, starting with 'our brothers, in whose hands . . . '"

Again and again the ruler hit the table in time with the desperate shouts of the little man, red with rage. The boy started again from the beginning, exhausted, with even less success.

He had to hold out his hand. The ruler came crashing down, ten times, like ice, on his fingers. The tears wouldn't come, just wouldn't, they gurgled in the depths. He held them back in time out of pity for himself. His throat was as tight as if he were being suffocated by smoke. He was splitting in two, he didn't care. Another self, detached from him, would cope with these sessions.

No one had ever struck him before. Not even the time when he had seen his father being led off at gunpoint and he had continued playing with the other children in the yard: they had called him "selfish." He didn't understand what the word meant, just felt its weight, the guilt, in his hurry to join the others, who were looking for smooth, flat pebbles to play ducks and drakes, stones that would hit the water with a smack and leap to the opposite bank of the river. Even then no one had hit him; he had never been hit until now.

The closer they got to the event, the more demanding became the rehearsals. Only the day before – since there was little hope of getting it right – his cousin had tried, with disarming stupidity, to revive their old friendship. He was joking, to show him that he could be at once young and old . . .

Now the strange hand squeezed his absentmindedly. The teacher had neither the ability nor the sensitivity to revise and correct his earlier impressions of the boy. He would have been amazed were he aware of the calm detachment with which he was being observed. The boy had long since become skillful at shielding his feelings by retreating behind a pale mask of sleepiness. But at this particular moment he let himself go, living his experiences intensely. The teacher's presence had lost all power over him. He let himself be swept along by the frenzy of the crowd that was about to explode.

He watched the throngs in the park. Rebellious voices, festive voices.

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Youthful eyes, mirrors shimmering with the reflection of leaves still moist with dew. The teacher's hand seemed lifeless; he didn't catch his companion's mood.

A murmur ran through the foliage, then stillness hovered briefly over the park. But right away the railroad worker's brass band boomed a military march. A tall, very thin man with a large mustache got up on the improvised podium. He spoke of the war, of suffering in the camps, of peace, of retribution, justice, labor.

Behind the stage the small hero waited his turn. He was to speak right after the officer, before the woman. His cousin's hand, forgotten on the crown of his head, suddenly propelled him in front of the crowd.

They lifted him up and stood him up on a chair. The crowd's excitement grew. Then they abandoned him in front of the seething multitude. He was not afraid that he would forget the order of the words or the proper intonation. He was terrified that the chair might fail him, that it would overturn and pitch him forward into the pit.

They were waiting for him in total silence. He felt their eagerness, their ravenous hunger. Pulling himself together, he met them head-on.

"We, who haven't known the meaning of childhood, nourished by cold and fear, under the mantle of war, we turn, today . . . "

He didn't see their veiled eyes, their tears. Applause, bravos – he rallied, haggard and drained.

Behind the podium the cousin accepted congratulations. His embarrassed face indicated that the speech had lived up to his expectations, its success was deserved. As for the little actor, he was passed from the arms of one relative to another, then to the acquaintances. The avalanche of embraces wore him out. The solicitude with which he was treated relieved him. They kept asking him, again and again, if they could get him anything, if he wanted anything, their words and gestures hesitant, as if they were afraid to hurt his feelings.

For a long while afterward the hero could still feel the crown of laurels on his head. Numerous privileges that he now enjoyed reminded him of his triumph.

His cousin, the teacher, now consented to become the comrade he had been in the past. He sought other outlets for his intransigence and zeal. He thought that, surely, the boy would have forgotten the harshness with which he had treated him; after all, experiences of that sort served to build character. They started going on long evening walks again and having many conversations. Everything could be just as before.

Still, ostensibly the event was not forgotten. They recalled it at every opportunity. Indeed, they seemed to look for opportunities to bring it up, and each time they found one they seemed to become more and more familiar with the great event, they even started to act proprietary

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toward it, with the growing conviction that it somehow belonged to them.

People would stop dead in the street to take a look at the precocious celebrity. Acquaintances, or even complete strangers, would cross from the other sidewalk and walk up to the white-haired lady:

"Excuse me, but isn't that the boy who gave the speech?"

They patted him on the head. He would feel, for an instant, as if a golden power were ennobling his shoulders. Then it would be over. He would be yelled at because he did not say hello to the tobacconist's fat wife, because his fingernails were dirty, or there he goes again, putting his hands in his pockets, he looks elsewhere, doesn't pay attention when grown-ups talk to him. . . .

Nothing upset him more than the compliments of relatives, particularly of those who lived far away and had not participated in the event, but were impressed by the mere echo of his fame.

"But my dear, why don't you come to see us? . . . I've heard . . . of course bring him over at least once. I beg you . . . "

During these visits, in houses of people he did not know, the hero was served up right after the dessert. Tears were shed and immediately forgotten in the chatter and the shouting, as each guest tried to drown out the next. Afterward coffee was served, weak and sweet.

An ever-greater number of new acquaintances turned up – wives of cousins three times removed, former neighbors of the cripple who delivered seltzer water, childhood friends of deceased grandparents. People looked for each other, trying to recapture the old life, the old pleasures.

The winds of hope shook the little town during these first months of peace. They lived loudly and with excess vitality. The lust for life constantly sought reasons to break out and often did without any rea-

The parks rustled with tango rhythms. Visits, birthdays, name days, anniversaries, parties, engagements, weddings. Especially weddings. Weddings of relatives and acquaintances, of neighbors, friends, and friends of friends, innumerable weddings. They went everywhere they were invited, as if to make up for lost time and reassure themselves that they had come back alive, that they could start over again with renewed strength. The whole family went, no one was left behind, neither the old nor the children.

. . . It would be hard to say whose idea it was. Somehow, it was in the air. People kept looking for something new, exciting, something to stoke the fire, to provoke tears, laughter. Never mind who was the first to suggest it – they seized it instantly, casually. The boy went along without reacting.

He still remembered the first time he had felt as though smoke were choking him: he couldn't breathe, and then he seemed to split in two.

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The soldier had given him a quarter of a loaf of bread. Grandfather's and Mother's livid faces appeared in the doorway, astonished. He had returned victorious. They could hardly believe their eyes; but they forbade him ever to go near a soldier again. A part of him, the part drawn toward friendship with the soldier, was gradually torn away from him. In the following weeks, tortured by hunger, the boy often felt as though he were choking from smoke. But he became accustomed to it and learned to face it calmly.

He was jolted from his plunge into the past by the percussionist's bang on the drums. The dance stopped, the couples separated. The time for tears had come.

"Quiet everybody! Quiet, please! We have a guest of honor!"

They stood him on a chair or on a table. The wedding guests got their handkerchiefs ready. Near the door, a young man caressed his girlfriend's shoulder. When the applause broke out, he drew her closer to him.

Up on his podium, the guest of honor recited his lines. His white shirt-collar lit up his pale face, its delicate features blurred with fatigue. The stinging smoke choked him only rarely now. The split occurred painlessly. It was someone else who stood in front of him, who recited the same pathetic speech. He had become used to what was happening to him.

Applause and embraces followed. The newcomers repeated the gestures of the guests at previous parties. Those who had accompanied him to other weddings – close relatives or the habitual partygoers – were already familiar with his act, and they smiled at him conspiratorially.

He could escape the gushing and the pawing only when he finally found himself in front of a gigantic slice of wedding cake. They also brought him a small glass of wine. The musicians, he noticed, were given larger ones. It was his habit to withdraw into a corner near the orchestra.

Forgotten near the instrument cases, lost in the melodies, he would slide back into the past, among once-familiar faces: Grandfather's before the sickness struck him, as he lay his large old hand on this shoulder. . . . The doctor's in tears, standing by the bridge during that first night of plundering, after they had been attacked and dragged off the freight cars, their clothing, their rings, everything they still owned taken away from them.

Only Uncle and a very few others had been able to hold on to some money. He must have taken plenty of cash with him and hidden it so well that he still had it even after all the searches and beatings they endured. He had managed to keep the money; you could tell by the large slices of bread and jam he would buy. People would give a coat for two

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slices of bread, but that wouldn't worry him. Form time to time, he came to them, nevertheless, to borrow money. Not much, small sums, for a few days. He never spent any of it, obviously, and he always returned it on time. But when Mara got sick they put a stop to his little game.

"What are you doing here? What are you thinking about?"

A heavy hand rested on the nape of his neck. Every now and then a reveler would discover him behind the double bass, startling him out of his trance. He would pick up the boy and hand him back to his family or drag him to the head table, forcing the bride to grant him the first dance of the evening, as a mark of respect. The groom would nod his consent.

Attempts were made to silence the crowd, but the buzzing persisted. Chairs were pushed to one side, the band blew a long fanfare. The bride strode to the center of the floor to honor the famous guest. She led him gently, bending over him from time to time with a smile. The music did its part while he hurried and counted the steps, one to the left, two to the right; sometimes he would trip over the long train or the buckle and black shiny tongue of his shoe would get caught in the veil. The dance with the bride was not so much the high point of the evening as an interlude. He saw people chatting in groups, distracted, faces flushed from too much food and drink.

Occasionally his oratorical zeal was rewarded by a talk with the bride's father-in-law, who would make room next to himself at the head of the table, trying to look wise as he marveled at the hero's precocity.

But, carried away by music and drink, they soon forgot him and he returned to sit by the saxophone case. The musicians toiled conscientiously, arousing desire and spreading gaiety. The hall heated up, a haze of perspiration rose on clouds of dust.

The boy withdrew behind the percussionist; he rocked on the legs of the narrow, rickety chair and leaned his back against the wall. Frenzy mounted, they chatted and chatted, they recalled the dead and the suffering. They cried, flung money at the orchestra, clamored for horas and romantic tunes, fell into one another's arms.

Uncle had looked at Mara, ravaged by illness. He expressed sorrow for their misfortune. And then he asked them, with a certain bashfulness, to lend him some money, just for one day, just until tomorrow. Mother did not answer him; she was seething. He was her brother but he had reached bottom, she couldn't stand him any longer. She didn't answer him, not the second or the third time around, and he asked again and again in rising embarrassment. She simply looked into his eyes. Only after a while, in a tired voice, she said to him, "Sit here for a bit." Uncle stooped and, humiliated, did as he was told.

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Half an hour later Uncle took him along to stay with him for two weeks, to give Mara time to recover and to avoid contagion. Uncle had behaved toward him with unusual kindness. He had succeeded in getting a blanket for the boy's exclusive use. He slept rolled up in it like a bag and no longer felt the cold floor at night. For two whole weeks he even had enough food. Uncle brought him bread, spoiled him, protected him, frowned at his wife whenever she showed resentment at the attention their guest was enjoying. But the tensions surrounding Uncle had exhausted him, and he wished that all would be over soon so that he could return home.

"Hello there, sir, why are you all by yourself? Come on, let's go see the little monkey . . . "

This time it seemed it was a bris. He shouldn't have hid from the start; it didn't last long. He knew the rituals of the various festivities, there were so many of them.

Once he woke up around midnight. His speech raced through his mind; he looked as through fog at the confusion in the room, the sour mood of the hung-over couples. He realized that his act must have been over a while ago, that it was probably the moment to approach the bride, that is, if he had executed the earlier part of the program. He stumbled sleepily to the head of the table and found himself face to face with a roly-poly grandmother in a white gown, with a flower wreath, bloated features, flour and syrup mingled into sweat running down her pasty face. This time it was not a real wedding but an anniversary, he now remembered . . . a silver wedding anniversary. Too late – the old bag had spotted him. Hastily she welcomed him, smiled at him with her big metal teeth, impatiently reached over to him with gravy-stained hands. The remains of a slice of wedding cake were melting on the dessert plate in front of her. She insisted that he eat it and offered him her lipstick-smeared spoon . . . He also saw the pickles, the chicken leftovers, the rice drenched in tomato sauce, the deep bowl of whipped cream. Swaying with nausea, he groped his way back to his corner by the orchestra and clutched tightly to his chair. They raised him onto his feet with difficulty – he had fallen suddenly in his sleep and the room was topsy-turvy, as though after an earthquake – and he had another round with the old bride. Next morning his family found him in bed at the neighbors', where he had been dropped off.

"Come, let's go, it's morning."

Other parties, other weddings. From now on everything will be different, they said, but, as though afraid of some impending calamity, they couldn't hold back. Something impelled them to recoup their energy and start all over again. The frail boy up on the chair touched them; the words of his speech bolstered their determination.

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Who could tell whose idea it had been? Its promoters proved to be right; it didn't matter whose idea it had been. The young speaker lived up to expectations.. . . Sometimes his speech was scheduled for the conclusion of a party, sometimes it was overlooked altogether. The hero would sneak away to the musicians' corner. He felt at ease in their company.

A new morning dawned, his legs moved unsteadily, cool air soothed his eyelids. It was as if his other self wanted to split away again, like when Uncle came to borrow money to forestall them from doing the same, or when he guiltily stretched out his hand and his cousin, the teacher, gave him a blow that felt as though it would cut off all his fingers. At parties he had always looked for his cousin, hoping to see him, at least once, mellowed by food and drink. But he never showed up. They said that the teacher was "off his rocker," he disappeared from home for days, even weeks, at a time, roaming the countryside with bands of rebels, unafraid of hunger or hardship. He had grown gaunt, emaciated, and each time he returned, they said, he could hardly wait to get going again.

The boy relived that extraordinary morning, the banners and flags, the men's lively glances, the streets dipped in gold, the festive riot in the park. He had fallen right into the bubbling, scalding applause, his skin red and swollen . . . no, no, that was another time, when they cured him with blue vitriol, held him fast so he couldn't escape. He remembered how he had drawn away from his cousin, bit by bit, when his friendship turned out to be a trap. From then on he was always on his guard.

Evening had come again. Candles and light bulbs illuminated the ballroom; the pale bride stood smiling at her father-in-law's side. His friends the musicians gave the signal: a mighty beat on the big drum, two blows with the flat of the hand on the cymbals, and the hall fell silent.

"And now, a surprise: our own young . . . "

A chair was set up in place, the audience regrouped. The soloist was lifted and placed on the pedestal.

"We, who haven't known the meaning of childhood . . . "

Afterwards – a slice of wedding cake, a small glass of wine, the horrors of the past. The nights, dragged out until dawn, flowed slowly; it took a long time for their dregs, and the thick, murky voices around him, to settle down. Then morning came. A spring day again, soft breezes blowing on tender eyes, and the boy offered the crowd his feelings, his old, choking fears. The muddy night grew thin and was washed away. Again, a delicate dawn flutters over the thick black crust of the night before. Eyes grow luminous; daylight rises, bearing life.

The sky sparkled like a new knife. Only at dawn did he feel the smoke choking him again. He reeled, dizzy with weariness and sadness.

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POEMS

CHARLES SIMIC

Romantic Sonnet

Evenings of sovereign clarity –
Wine and bread,
Mother praying,
Father naked in bed.

All the prisons had their doors thrown open.
Was I that skinny boy stretched out
In the tall grass,
His heart cut out with a toy knife?

Happiness, you are the bright red lining
Of a dark winter coat
Grief wears inside out.

This is about myself when I'm reminiscing,
And your morgue attendant's nails,
O Time, I kept chewing and chewing.

Haunted Mind

Savageries to come,
Cities smelling of death already,
What idol will you worship,
Whose icy heart?

In a neighborhood dive
One cold Thursday night,
I watched the Beast of War on TV
Lick its sex.

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There were three other customers:
Mary sitting in old Joe's lap,
Her crazy son in the corner
With arms spread wide and a broken neck.

LES MURRAY

The Ballad of the Barbed Wire Ocean

No more rice pudding. Pink coupons for Plume. Smokes under the lap
for aunts.
Four running black boots beside a red sun. Flash wireless words like
Advarnce.
When the ocean was wrapped in barbed wire, terror radiant up the
night sky,
exhilaration raced flat out in squadrons; Mum's friends took off sun-hats
to cry.

Starting south of the then world with new showground rifles being
screamed at and shown
for a giggle-suit three feeds a day and no more plans of your own,
it went with some swagger till God bless you, Tom! and Daddy come
back! at the train
or a hoot up the gangways for all the girls and soon the coast fading in
rain,

but then it was flared screams from blood-bundles whipped rolling as
iron bombers keened down
and the insect-eyed bombers burned their crews alive in off-register henna
and brown.
In steep ruins of rainforest pre-affluent thousands ape-scuttling mixed
sewage with blood
and fear and the poem played vodka to morals, fear jolting to the
mouth like cud.

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It was sleep atop supplies, it was pickhandle, it was coming against the wall in tears,
sometimes it was factory banter, stoking jerked breechblocks and filing souvenirs,
or miles-wide humming cattleyards of humans, or oiled ship-fires slanting in ice,
rag-wearers burst as by huge War Bonds coins, girls' mouths full of living rice.

No one came home from it. Phantoms smoked two hundred daily. Ghosts held civilians at bay,
since war turns beyond strut and adventure to keeping what you've learned, and shown,
what you've approved, and what you've done, from ever reaching your own.
This is died for. And nihil and nonsense feed on it day after day.

SUSAN LASHER

The American Philosopher

Fame came easily – the rumor
of a perfect solitude:
one plate, one cup, one crude

utensil like a pen. Notched
time was kept like the token
shipwreck and its slave –

the wrecked, the subtlest
footprint in the sand.
Here, on the pebbled beach

of the quiet mossy pond,
the accidental discovery
of his own small hand-

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print on a rock, the mistaken
recognition of his mind,
was sublime only in scope:

an American sentiment of hope,
the dozen roads not taken
in a grander undertaking.

This project leans
to the left: a wobbly cabin
in the woods, a garden full

of beans, the buzz of bees
like hymns made in his restive,
dubious workshop with a lathe.

And having once seen, saw
once and for all the perfect
life: the speaker and the spoken

to, arranged in perfect
resonance: the book and the world
declaring to the silent stars.

The offspring of thought –
the act – moves and removes
itself. The weeds proliferate

in just proportion to the need
for work. Clean –
of necessity redefined –

things and the ghost
of anger remain, blinking
into the dark, then

into the light. Unthinking,
the thinker turns into the worker.
Guilty and blameless, the shirker

shrinks back into the secret
woods, where the incontrovertible tax
of men and arms and a world

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at constant war is held off,
as from a great fortress.
The warm solid ovals are pulled

from beneath the speckled hens,
the bursting crimson fruit drops
from the vines at the fence,

the greedy finches snatch
the jewel-like berries.
The total, ripe, rapacious

arguments of nature
are held up for a lesson
as in some Socratic dialogue

with a private rhetoric
of quirky weather and a grammar
of quotidian chores.

The words of the world enclose
him who reads leaning;
who leans, resting

on his hoe from breaking
stubborn clods of clay.
Longing has been too long

the motive for beauty;
and solitude too much enshrined
like a monstrous Buddha

with the twining arms
of selfish gifts. The gift
and the lie shimmer

in reflection on the pond
with a vaporous light,
a mosquito's hum as dirge.

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Compromised of its purity
the white of the mind remains
immaculate and free,

like the shirring dive
of a hawk hunting by moonlight,
or the first weak winter frost.

O, philosopher . . . the dream
of a friend! An occasional
visitor to the quiet pond,

the strangely perfect friend,
contemplative and rational
even in love. Inevitable fame

supplants potentially candid love,
like a feckless weed. The shame
of the self begins. The rock

of the self begins to face: a pure
thought now like a cairn, self-made:
an uncommon statue in a common shade.

JONATHAN AARON

From the 1929 Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica

for Adam Zagajewski

The Himalayas are unclimbed,
politely marvelled at.

A smiling technician poses
in the jaws of an electric generator.

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A hearty account, with diagrams,
of the types of decisive attack
favored by Alexander the Great.

A short entry on Lithuania
("an independent European republic"),
the Japanese tea ceremony in twenty-seven plates,
and "a nomad fakir of India"
reading his prayers on a bed of nails.

In the Krupp works in Essen the freshly cast
steel frame of a large riveter
hangs from the ceiling
like an industrial version of Rembrandt's
"Flayed Ox."

Mussolini is "an Italian statesman" with
"obvious honesty of purpose."

A trained eagle gathers to land
on the fist of a man wearing a fencing mask,
a horsehide glove, and a double
leather sleeve for his left arm.

RIKA LESSER

Love

Into the void lovers toss looks thoughts
declarations, imagining these
will be welcomed wholly without
confusion or hesitation
He pleads: *Love, touch alone preserves*
She argues: *Love endures distance*
(How near can we come in love, out of
love, how much can be given?)

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Longing, he goes too far, hammers out
of her a frieze, a series of scenes
fixed in his memory And though
she wants love to grow to unfold
open steadily, in her it snaps
shut, forced by his memory
    (How far will we go for love, out
    of love, how much can be taken?)

What has gone wrong? Was it untrue? He
mouths the questions *Where has love gone? Will
it return?* His heart holds answers:
Some mistake No God knows Let's hope
He repeats *But I love I miss*
I want . . . will survive without her
    (How long can we wait, out of love, for
    love's return, how long be patient?)

Someone I love is leaving, she writes,
I bid him farewell, a good journey
Someone I love is dying, I can't
say goodbye though the time is coming
How much room do we have for love
just how large is our heart-space?
    (How many can it hold at once
    with no prospect of solace?)
I loved you, I love you still, perhaps
less surely Your words sound the burden
of need: *Will you take care of me?*
Once again in the face of loss
I ask that same question and pray
    your grasp may exceed your reach:
    you will know how to hold me

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SUZANNE PAOLA

The Two

The two from whose bodies you formed me
in the limits of time.
- Augustine

No bird shrilled newly that new morning.
Nothing was lit that had not been lit, when I came.
Only one man and one woman listened with a turning heart.
The air beat with the sound of new voices.

Flesh & spirit

My father held me in one hand.
I remember learning to name, Adam's labor.
His labor wasn't life. That was easy in the walled garden.
But the making of sounds *owl, hawk, cat* and releasing.
Each word a cell into which just one spirit fit.
We called my life *the little tiny sorrow.*
My father held me in one gloved hand.

Male & female

he created them –
the father the benevolent absence
the mother the presence that can never give enough
and the children behind, the dutiful and the lost.
Sometimes we'd drive to the bungalow my grandfather built
with its own well, and well water so foul
only we could drink it. Its flavor

rust & rot

and our thirst ran pure
for such water. The way the mind thirsts
and memory slips up from the deep with every sulfurous
draught, and we drink. And say *it is not enough.*
At six I dreamed my parents left me at that house
as the gulls glided, and I screamed myself awake.
Can it be that we hunger even for this.

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Earth & seas

There I learned to say
gull fish Suzanne even *horseshoe crab*
as the creatures lay like armed disembodied heads
along the beach, waving their stranded claws.
Through those two words I learned their pain
wasn't my pain, though I couldn't stop
rolling them back to the sea.

Word & human

And the crabs, pinched, Silurian
moved across the face of the waters.
This was my God. Not the shelled creatures
or the sea, but the tension in the salt air,
the distance, as they slowly contracted and sank
into the algal depths, as I mourned their oblivion
the way my parents learned to mourn

morning & evening

all that we'd never understand:
hunger, and the freezing tenement in Brooklyn,
the many lives they threw away to stay together
for the sake of two strange, olive-skinned children.
I remember a look on the face, mouth set, eyes
inward, a look of anger and grief
and perserverant forgiveness,

and I knew God must have looked so
in the garden, when he finally decided the image must live,
and he took the trembling clay into his hands
so that even solitude would have a name.

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JULES SUPERVIELLE*

Without Walls

The whole sky is stained with ink like the fingers of a boy.
Where's the school and the satchel?
Under the wood of the table, hide this hand away –
It too is covered with black stains.
Forty children's stares are chopping up my solitude.
What have I done with the ocean,
In what airy wilderness did the flying fish die?
I'm sixteen years old somewhere on earth and in the high mountains,
I'm sixteen years old on the rivers and around Notre Dame,
In the Lycée Janson
Where I see time passing across the watch-face of my palms.
The pounding of my heart keeps me from hearing the teacher's voice.
I'm thoroughly afraid of life and its hobnailed boots
And my fear makes me so ashamed that my glance goes astray
And is lost in the distance where second thoughts can never appear.
The sound of horses on asphalt is shining through my muggy soul
And is mirrored wrong side up, criss-crossed by beams of light.
A fly vanishes into the sand inside the ceiling,
Latin makes camp around us and shows us its leprosy;
I can no longer dare touch a thing on the table of black wood.
When I raise my eyes, at the Orient of the lecture stand
I see a girl whose face is like beauty,
Whose face is like pain, like necessity.
A girl is sitting there, she makes her heart shimmer
Like a feverish bangle set with remote precious stones.
A cloud of boys keeps on gliding steadily towards her lips
But never appears to advance.
It seems she's wearing a garter, she exists far from pleasure,
And her half naked leg, restless, swings back and forth.
Her throat is so alone in the world that we're terrified she might be cold,
(Is that my voice asking if the windows could be closed?)
She would like to be in love with all the boys in the class,

---

*"Sans Murs" is from *Gravitations 1925* by Jules Supervielle. Copyright © Editions Gallimard 1925. Translated with permission.

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This girl who has appeared to us,
But knowing she will die if the teacher discovers her
She begs us to be discreet so she can live on for a moment more
And be a pretty girl among the adolescent boys.
At a corner of the globe the sea counts and recounts its waves
And pretends to have more of them than there are stars in the sky.

Translated from the French by Geoffrey Gardner

EMILY GROSHOLZ

Two Passages from Colette

I.

The hill smokes with white plum trees,
each one immaterial and dappled
as a round cloud.
At half past five in the morning
under dew and horizontal ray,
the young wheat's unarguably
blue, the earth iron-red,
plum trees copper-pink.
Only for a moment;
the fey dishonest light goes out
with the first hour of day.
Everything grows in godly heat.
The least vegetable creature
hurls itself straight up.
Peonies, blood-red in the first month,
geyser so hard
that stalk and barely unpleated
petals crack, push up, suspend in air
their crust of earth, tipped like a broken roof.

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II.

The beak of pruning shears
clacks along the hedge of rose trees.
Another calls back, from the border.
Soon a straw of young sprouts,
tips rosy as dawn,
green and succulent further down,
will lie beneath the roses.
On the border, stiff wands
of apricot, sacrificed,
will burn with small flower-flames
an hour before dying,
and the bees let none of it perish.

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KAREN WILKIN

At the Galleries

Rumblings in the art world have it that "installation art" is the thing to watch: witness the top floor of the last Whitney Biennial and *Dislocations*, Robert Storr's debut as curator of contemporary art at the Museum of Modern Art. Yet if last fall was an accurate indicator, we should be paying more attention to painting than ever. Not all of last season's painting exhibitions were noteworthy or even any good at all, but it was clear that *painting* - as opposed to video, signage, or random scatterings of urban detritus – is still profoundly engaging the attention of serious artists and viewers. That's not a value judgement; it is simply a statement of fact.

Two exhibitions by Richard Diebenkorn, a retrospective at London's Whitechapel Gallery and a show of recent works on paper at New York's Knoedler Gallery, in November, could serve as indicators of the phenomenon, both here and elsewhere. (The London show will travel to Madrid and Frankfurt in 1992.) In London, Diebenkorn was something of a revelation to both younger artists and those with longer memories. Everyone kept urging me to see the show, and they were right. I have vivid recollections of my first encounter with Diebenkorn's bold, rock-solid figures, when he, Elmer Bischoff, and David Park burst upon New York in the early sixties. Too often since then, we have seen only Diebenkorn's abstract paintings – his stripped-down geometric constructions, at once economical and very worked, of the seventies and eighties. The best of these are elegant, intelligent, and light-filled in a way that makes Diebenkorn's relation to California equivalent to Matisse's to Nice, but they can also be dry and repetitious to the point of being almost generic. Diebenkorn's drawing retrospective at MOMA a few years ago helped to remind us of his range and his inventiveness, but it was the abstract works on paper that seemed strongest to me, in that context. Had the potency of those early figure paintings been exaggerated by time? Not according to the Whitechapel show.

There, a remarkably fine selection of works allowed us to consider Diebenkorn's familiar recent paintings alongside of both his pivotal figurative canvases and his even earlier abstractions. The latter, from 1949 to

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about 1954, were strangely anonymous and dated, more suggestive of disguised landscape than real formal exploration. In the mid-fifties, the long shadow of de Kooning appears to have fallen on Diebenkorn in Berkeley. The young painter began then to build his pictures of overlapping soft-edged planes, reminiscent of de Kooning's abstractions of the 1940s, and, at the same time, to allow himself more overt reference to actuality; perhaps de Kooning's own "reversion" to figuration, the Women of the 1950s, gave Diebenkorn permission to pursue his own inclinations. From 1955 on, Diebenkorn's pictures have more energy and personality than anything that preceded them, a fusion of vigorous "pure" painting and free but convincing illusionism. His seated figures, domestic interiors, and landscapes of the late fifties and early sixties still seem remarkably fresh, energetic, and audacious. Their generous images are built of robust, juicy brush strokes that effortlessly carve out distances or lay in limbs, furniture, trees, and domestic utensils, all with the same assurance. Diebenkorn's paintings of this period rationalize the looseness and brushiness of "wet into wet" Abstract Expressionism – de Kooning, as opposed to Pollock or Rothko – using the angst-ridden gestures of New York abstraction to describe a sun-dappled, idyllic world. Somehow, it works.

In contrast to these brash early works, the later pictures in the Whitechapel exhibition – the Ocean Park series, from the late sixties through 1985 – seemed slightly cautious, a little aestheticized. Their compositions are trued and faired, their color narrowed to a hazy beachfront palette of whitened blues, blued whites, and the occasional blast of ultramarine. They are solemn, frontal pictures; being in a room full of Ocean Park paintings is like standing in a complex of classical temples. The Whitechapel's excellent selection of the abstract works stressed their individuality and sensuality, so that Diebenkorn's paintings of the seventies and eighties never looked better to me, but at the same time, they seemed to lack the spiritedness, the rawboned *daring* of the earlier works. The same was true of the recent works on paper in the Knoedler exhibition, many of which seemed rather labored and overly fussed over. It's also true that, generally, they explored a wider territory than has been evident in the past few years, with a new looseness of structure, a new release from the implied vertical-horizontal grid of so many of the abstract pictures that seems to hark back to earlier strategies. These changes may result from Diebenkorn's recently having moved away from Ocean Park, or they may have been provoked by his reviewing his own past during the preparation of the retrospective.

What is clear is that Diebenkorn has explored the same, absolutely fundamental issue from the earliest works in the Whitechapel show to the most recent collage at Knoedler: how to reconcile a three-dimen-

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sional world of deep space and strong contrast with the reality of thin color on a two-dimensional surface. That is, of course, as simple and as complex a notion of what painting is as anyone could formulate. (It kept Diebenkorn's hero, Matisse, fully occupied for his entire life as a painter.) John Elderfield's essay in the beautifully produced Whitechapel catalogue is a provocative discussion of this endlessly challenging concept. As he did in his splendid piece in the *Matisse in Morocco* catalogue, Elderfield sensitively probes the tension between the literal material from which art is made and the artist's perceptions. Diebenkorn's work appears to test the expressive possibilities of a mysterious zone somewhere between the stuff of art and intention, between the fact of paint and illusion, however veiled. The seriousness with which he has addressed this formidable task for the past thirty years can elicit only profound respect and admiration.

The challenges Diebenkorn addresses in his work are, I suspect, what Frances Barth means when she speaks of "the big questions." Certainly her exhibition at the Tenri Gallery in September and October would bear out this assumption. Barth's recent work grapples with seemingly contradictory conceptions of the canvas as inviolable expanse and as window into illusory space. In her best works, she warps and twists space, apparently as we look, seducing us with an elegant touch across the surface, and then leading us effortlessly into a fictive landscape. It's like having a limitless view spread at our feet and being able to fly out into it. I don't mean to suggest that there is anything tricky or facile about Barth's paintings, nor that there is anything literal about her imagery. Quite the opposite. Her references are acute but fleeting, like things seen in dreams. Barth's pictures are intelligent, thoughtful improvisations that seem to pit the history of Western illusionism against Western modernism, with a suggestion of Eastern space thrown in for good measure – not to mention a powerful sense of personal, if wordless, narrative. All of this is a very clumsy way of saying that they are extremely individual, sometimes puzzling pictures that reward our attention. Economical in color, with a plentiful use of white that somehow reads as space, modest in size, Barth's canvases are rich and satisfying.

A notably different notion of what painting can be, albeit from an artist of completely another generation, was offered by Philippe Daverio Gallery's "Mark Tobey in the 1950s," in October. Tobey's hermetic, inward-turning pictures are neither commentaries on the world nor on the conventions of painting itself, but private meditations. The selection at Daverio was outstanding – mostly small paradigmatic pictures from what are often regarded as Tobey's best years. In some, the celebrated "white writing" – his automatist scrollings of white line – coiled across the page, fraying off at the edges, like textiles crocheted out of light. It was

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easy to see from these tightly focused works how much Tobey learned from the Eastern miniatures he admired.

Tobey occupies an odd place in the history of recent American art. Always difficult to classify – stubborn, mystic, independent – he was acclaimed in the fifties but lost some of his status, at least in New York, after he moved to Switzerland in 1960. (He spent the rest of his life there, until his death in 1976 at the age of eighty-five.) Yet for the past three decades, Tobey has remained an important figure in the Pacific Northwest, where he lived and taught for many years, and his European reputation has soared. His elegant, delicate, intimate pictures appealed to European sensibilities in ways that much American postwar painting did not. In this country, especially in New York, Tobey's fragile webs of drawn line were sometimes compared to Pollock's large-scale pours and suffered from the confrontation; on the West Coast, connections with Asian meditative art were more usual, while in Europe, it seemed obvious that Tobey's obsessive, intensely private works had more to do with the quasi-devotional explorations of, for instance, Paul Klee, than with most of his compatriots. Daverio Gallery is to be congratulated for reintroducing New York audiences to Tobey. (This is their second survey of his work.) It's useful to be reminded that American abstraction is not solely about heroic gestures.

This is not to deny the vitality of the heroic in American art. It still flourishes, as was made plain by Edvins Strautmanis's forthright new paintings at Stephen Rosenberg Gallery in October and November. It would be easy to dismiss the Latvian-born, Art Institute of Chicago-educated Strautmanis as the last Abstract Expressionist, if the undeniable intensity of feeling in his pictures didn't make them so convincing. Strautmanis's overscaled brushstrokes, sometimes insisting on the dimensions and proportions of the canvas, sometimes fighting against them, and his brooding color seem motivated by authentic emotional impulses. In the context of the nineties, Strautmanis's Silver Paintings, as his current series is known, become the abstract paintings that Gerhardt Richter's recent work parodies. Like Richter's, Strautmanis's canvases are rough-hewn, layered, full of sensually ploughed paint, and monumentally scaled. The difference is that Strautmanis's paintings are "straight" – the real thing, minus the modish irony, the detachment, and the cynicism. Strautmanis has been at it a long time, with unflagging seriousness and energy, and his new pictures, with their luminous darks and odd veilings of dragged color, are the strongest of his works that I've seen to date. It's easy to identify the artists he regards as his ancestors – de Kooning, Hofmann, maybe even Kline – but I suspect this is largely due to like conviction that a painting is a visible record of a state of mind. That the state of mind is a passionate one is what separates Strautmanis's assertive works

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from much recent abstract painting.

And there is a surprising amount of ambitious abstract painting out there just now. (I didn't say "a surprising amount of *good* abstract painting," nor, alas, is it clear that the ambition is for the art itself.) Probably the most talked about shows last November were, in fact, two group exhibitions of recent abstract painting, "La Metafisica della Luce," at John Good Gallery and "Conceptual Abstraction," at Sidney Janis Gallery; many of the same artists – the new abstract painters to be reckoned with, we are told – were seen in both shows. They occupy the opposite end of the spectrum from Diebenkorn, Strautmanis, and the kind of faith in the raw power of painting that their work posits. Passion gives way to a "cool," or more properly, chilled-out abstraction: hip, sophisticated, detached and fully equipped with supporting theory, explication, texts – even, it appears, built-in critics. According to the artists' statements in the catalogue of the Janis show and the curiously incestuous autumn 1991 issue of the magazine *Tema Celeste* (Italian speakers take note: that's what American artists mean when they say "Teema Sell-Est"), their work is markedly different from other abstract art. *Tema Celeste*'s editor, for example, describes them as making paintings "totally devoid of recognizable images, while producing something that does not simply repeat, in a sterile manner, what has been done in earlier decades." How does it differ? Earlier American abstract painting was empty, arbitrary, hermetic, about its own history, shackled by rules – that it was dictated by Clement Greenberg is often implied; the new "post-historicist abstraction" is unprecedentedly free, inventive, and despite its refusal to admit overt emotion or signal choice, loaded with significance. How can we tell? Because the artists and the critics who support them (who are, incidentally, often one and the same) say so.

This is not the place for an analysis of the articles in the fall *Tema Celeste* or of the relationship of the magazine to the two shows, but someone has to point out that conflict of interest is rampant when the editor of a magazine who devotes a special issue to a "movement" defined largely by that magazine also selects a commercial gallery exhibition of the artists he espouses and then fills the issue with ads for the galleries that represent them. (This was how the John Good show was chosen, and rumors abound as to how the special issue was funded.) There is also the matter of artist-critics writing enthusiastically about each other – wives, husbands, and significant others included.

It says something about the state of art today that the work of these new abstract painters looks far better in reproduction than it does in reality. If all you saw was the magazine, you might be convinced. In the flesh, issues of scale and surface that are irrelevant in photographs fre-

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quently pose serious problems in these pictures. Many of the paintings have a hard, slick feel that makes them look like life-sized reproductions of themselves. Randomness and anonymity prevail. You start wondering how a particular effect was achieved, rather than connecting with the picture itself. Text seems to count for a great deal, more perhaps than the experience of the actual object. A lot of heavy hitters – Arthur Danto, Leo Steinberg, Donald Kuspit – have contributed to the fall issue of *Tema Celeste*, seemingly in support of the artists in questions, although it is only fair to point out that they have written about general issues of what abstraction can mean in the nineties rather than specific endorsements. The most pretentious rhetoric, generally larded with modish allusions to Baudrillard and company, comes from the artists themselves and their in-house critics. If I am reading their singularly fuzzy and opaque prose correctly, the argument goes roughly like this: the randomness in their work is deliberate, a function of the unprecedented freedom post-historicism affords, provoked by the sensory and information overload of present-day, media-dominated, urban life. The content and appearance of these works also depends on a refusal to negate absence. (No kidding.) I kept thinking of that ancient *New Yorker* cartoon: "I'm disenchanted. He's disenchanted. We're all disenchanted."

There were some plausible paintings in the two exhibitions, some dreadful ones, some pretty good ones, and some peculiar inclusions. I wasn't certain what Sean Scully was doing in this company. His painting at John Good, a moody wall of blocky strokes, brushy texture and earthy color pulling energetically at deadpan basketweave structure, was one of the strongest works in the show and one of the most felt. It was obvious why one of Gerhardt Richter's slapdash abstractions was at John Good, as a sort of ur-text of "conceptual abstraction," but what was Per Kirkeby, an old-fashioned European-style painter doing there, apart from his connection with Josef Beuys? Come to think of it, much of the younger painters' work also looked rather old-fashioned; David Row's large, irregularly shaped abutments of rectangular canvases, with their gigantic "brushstroke" sweeps, clearly traced their ancestry to Frank Stella in the sixties, both in terms of composition and in their sour Day-Glo color, although their rough surfaces and economy of means owed more to Scully. Stella's acid palette and geometric imagery of the sixties and early seventies, as well as his icy detachment, haunted a good many of the works exhibited – Peter Halley's arrangements of hard-edged rectangles, for example. Some looked like reprises of that short-lived fad, pattern painting, while others achieved the desperate incoherence and self-conscious novelty of art school efforts. There were a few exceptions. At first acquaintance, Jonathan Lasker's pictures appeared to question the expressive possibilities of touch, playing thinly applied calligraphic scrawls

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against denser strokes and broader swipes, but too often, he seemed to rely on a programmed set of "moves." The pictures got weaker with longer viewing. (Admittedly, I am also basing this impression on work seen elsewhere than at the two shows.)

In general, the work simply didn't support the claims made for it. As a group, these pictures are extraordinarily cold, technically facile, and opaque – the very qualities that their authors and their supporters attribute to the earlier abstraction that they reject. Leaving aside the considerable qualitative differences between the current painters and their predecessors, for the sake of argument only, it is clear that the much-vaunted distinction between the *Tema Celeste* group's work and other abstraction is purely ideological. But if you can't see it, is it there? It may be simpleminded of me, but I expect to see evidence of what art is about in the art itself, not to find out what I am looking at by reading a trendy magazine.

Although the exhibitions at Good and Janis and the special issue of *Tema Celeste* purported to bring us news of an international phenomenon, there is evidence that there's another side to the story. An October exhibition at Zurcher Gallery in Paris by Bruno Rousselot, a young French painter now resident in New York, explored a rarified kind of geometric abstraction at once familiar and, in Rousselot's hands, utterly individual. The present series rings changes on a "labyrinth" image, a jagged line that cuts across the canvas, angling back on itself but never touching the edges of the picture and never intercepting itself. At first, one assumes that the image remains constant from picture to picture, despite variations in size, proportion, and color, but in fact, the bold zig-zag line is as subject to radical alteration as any other element. Its width, the proportion of its angles, the way it traces its path all vary, now subtly, now dramatically, from painting to painting. Rousselot keeps confounding our expectations. He has consciously and deliberately restricted his means but that has only heightened his ability to invent. In his best works, the labyrinth line does not isolate itself as a figure on an uninflected ground but carves out areas of unstable space. In part, this is a function of drawing and shape, but it is even more dependent on color. Rousselot is a master of the unnameable: reds that become purples as you look, blacks that turn into greens or silver grays, grays that turn brown or blue before your eyes. It takes time for the eye to adjust to these infinitely subtle nuances, but once you tune into Rousselot's world of close-valued, mysterious hues, his pictures come fully to life, bespeaking a minimalist sensibility that barely conceals great sensuality.

Manel Lledos, a young Barcelona painter, showed recent work in October and November at Galeria Joan Prats, New York. Lledos, like Rousselot, is very much part of a tradition, in Lledos's case a kind of

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simplified frontal "imagery" and an emphasis on materials and facture that seem very Catalan. His new paintings are roughly brushed, gridded structures whose cage-like images sometimes suggest architecture seen close up and other times imply ambiguous expanses. I liked Lledos's foursquare, direct canvases better than his more fluid, artful works on paper, but I enjoyed his evident pleasure in his materials in all of his work. How thin or how dense paint can be, the way it retains the memory of how it was put down, are as crucial to the structure of a Lledos painting as changes in tone or color. His large canvases are as much about how it feels to drag a brush full of paint from top to bottom of a band of color as they are about any kind of allusion, but they never degenerate into simple manipulation of material. And there's conviction in the paintings that is a welcome change from the worldy-wise cynicism of the new abstract painters at Sidney Janis. This is not Lledos's first show in New York, but it is certainly his best to date.

A tantalizing selection of work from Latin America was shown at Arnold Herstand Gallery in November. The works ranged from Carlos Alfonzo's vigorous, gloomy abstractions, reminiscent of his pictures in the recent Whitney Biennial, to Miguel Angel Rios's collaged constructions, where corrugated cardboard became the building unit for fantasy architecture. Some of the work seemed familiar – the sort of surrealizing narratives you can find almost anywhere that a European, rather than a North American, model dominates – but other paintings were truly surprising, with overtones of a strong vernacular tradition very different from our own. Sergio Vega's encaustic improvisation on a playing card image (or was it a tarot card?) was a fresh combination of lush surface and sleek, restrained image that became more assertive and provocative the longer one looked; the dense ground seemed about to devour the meandering figure. I am always abashed by how little I know about Latin American art. It probably has something to do with my speaking no Spanish, but it also has to do with the dearth of serious art from the region shown here. It's a peculiar phenomenon, given the visible and growing Hispanic presence in the United States. I can't say I was bowled over by everything I saw in the Herstand show, but it was all worth taking seriously – deeply felt, straightforward, and apparently committed. It made me curious about the context from which these artists emerged.

Painting may have dominated the fall season, but several sculpture shows were noteworthy. Anthony Caro showed recent table pieces, known as "Cascades," at André Emmerich Gallery in New York and at Annely Juda Gallery in London, as well as a group of large-scale works of the past few years at the Tate Gallery. In the Cascades, Caro reminded us once again of how he constantly reinvents himself by reexamining old

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obsessions and considering them in new ways. The sculptures state freshly what it means for something to be on a table, a question that has preoccupied Caro for about a quarter century. The Cascades do not recline passively on horizontal surfaces but spring off of them, plunge over the edge, embrace them – rather like inventive dancers exploring changes in level and direction. Some of their "protagonists" were fragile and slender, while others were notably robust albeit no less agile. There was even an astonishing piece at Emmerich with the visual weight and density (and more or less the size) of a rolltop desk, the base an integral part of the sculpture itself, a massive steel block from which equally massive elements spilled. Caro forces us to think about such basic notions as *on*, *around*, *above*, *below*, *beside*, and makes them seem like entirely unprecedented concepts. His unfailing sense of scale, of nuances of density or delicacy, forces us, too, to consider his sculptures as actual objects, at once like and unlike other objects in the world, creating a lively tension between their visual pyrotechnics and their intense physicality.

Sculpture's relationship to the body is a recurring theme in Caro's recent work. Indeed, it was the subtext of his exhibition at the Tate. One of the sculptures in the show, *After Olympia*, was last seen here in the roof garden of the Metropolitan Museum. There it held up well to the staggering view of Central Park and its skyline, and well, too, to some gruesome companions, including a truly repulsive, swollen bronze Botero reminiscent of a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon. At the Metropolitan, the urge was to back away from *After Olympia* and see it in its entirety, not the best view, as it turns out. The Tate installation forced us to walk beside the sculpture, setting up a dialogue between our bodies and the near-human size "modules" that are Caro's equivalents for the figure groups in the pediments of the temple at Olympia. The sculpture revealed itself incrementally, opening and closing, subtly altering as we moved along. It never looked better.

A more recent work in the show, *Night Movements*, departs from the same notion of incremental perception and depends similarly on cumulative experience. The sculpture consists of four large dark green units set in a row. At first, each seems self-contained, but they soon begin to reach out across the intervals that separate them, generating powerful force fields from one to another, until the spaces between each unit become as compelling as the sculptures themselves. In turn, the voids and hollows, the implied containments of each of the four units, with their swelling curves and scoops of massive steel, become increasingly important. *Night Movements* is a slow sculpture. It doesn't reveal itself quickly, but it gets better and more challenging the longer we stay with it.

If *After Olympia* and *Night Movements* engage our kinetic memory, the

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dramatic tower that was the centerpiece of Caro's installation at the Tate depends on literal physical participation. The monumental construction was conceived expressly to be entered, climbed through, penetrated, in order to be understood. The possibility of sculpture that addresses the entire body, not only the eye, has fascinated Caro for some time. In the past five or six years, he has constructed a climbing tower for children, a sculpture-boathouse, and a sculpture-village, begun in collaboration with the architect Frank Gehry in 1987, and still evolving as a series of independent sculptures. The Tate tower is simply the most recent manifestation of Caro's obsession. Reviewers kept saying that it turned adults into children, which is largely true. You scramble up narrow twisting stairs with treads that force you to pay attention to each step and risers that require some effort. You perch on a secret seat hidden from anyone else, peer down from a balcony, climb higher, duck through a door, reach a higher vantage point. It is like childhood play, but the walls of the passages and the stairs themselves, the entire construction, in fact, is made of steel, provoking a host of other, less playful associations.

I'm still not sure just how good the Tate tower is as a sculpture seen from the exterior, but moving through it is remarkable. Interestingly, having climbed through the tower makes you think about other sculpture in new ways. You mentally transport yourself into *Night Movements* or imagine what *After Olympia* feels like from inside the pediment. Caro has described his earliest figurative sculptures of thickset, earthbound figures as being "about what it is like to be inside the body." His tower sculpture puts a new spin on that notion.

It is typical of Caro to have constructed this behemoth in order to test an idea. (The piece was not fabricated from a maquette, but made like any other of his works: slowly, in the studio, with many alterations and adjustments during its evolution.) There's nothing theoretical about Caro's approach; a recurring motif in his statements since he began to make steel sculpture in 1960, has been the desire "to make sculpture real." The Tate tower makes it possible to rethink our relationship to Caro's brand of sculptural reality.

Intense physicality of another sort, in the form of unequivocal body parts as subject matter, was the basis of Mia Westerlund Roosen's recent sculptures, seen at Lennon-Weinberg Gallery in November. At first viewing, they were orthodox feminist works celebrating female genetalia, but they proved to be more inventive than that. In some sculptures, Roosen sheathes blunt forms with thin, soft-looking sheets of metal, creating a satisfying and slightly mysterious relationship of exterior to interior. Her earlier work, in fact, often made even more of this, on less specific, but no less evocative forms; their unseen interiors were extremely present in

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the subtle bulges of their apparently fragile skins.

In the end, the most specific-seeming of the sculptures in Roosen's recent show turned out to be the most ambiguous and possibly, as a result, the most interesting. A large, thrust-up "saddle" form, bearing ruffly labia, its formal rigor transcended reference; it had, for example, visual barriers where voids might have been expected, which reasserted the "saddle" form and encouraged a wider range of associations. A larger piece, a row of overlapping repeated narrow-arched forms, was weakened by color that restricted interpretation. No matter how inclusive the progression of warped plates, those suggestive rosy pink edges kept bringing you back to female anatomy. Perhaps this is what Roosen wants. Part of my preference for her metal-skin sculptures, as opposed to those built up of waxy, resin-like material, is due to the way the metal *does* operate as a skin, disembodying the pieces and leaving room for other metaphors.

I wish Roosen would let go of symmetry somewhat – her sculptures almost always split bilaterally these days – but she is someone to watch with interest. I found her expression of feminist concerns more personal and unpredictable than Louise Bourgeois's recent commentaries on similar issues, seen at roughly the same time at Robert Miller Gallery. This time around, the kitschy, pale-pink marble babies' hands and feet of Bourgeois's previous offerings have been replaced by equally lifelike adult legs and feet, no less creepy and no less like the worst of Victoriana than the earlier manifestations. I suppose I just don't find Bourgeois's discovery of the likeness between pinkish marble and flesh all that enthralling, and I do know that the only *trompe l'oeil* sculpture that ever moved me was Bernini's. (And he did his own carving, by all reports.) Bourgeois showed, too, works based on her obligatory clusters of metaphorical breast and phallus forms, in pink precast and in glass, once again emphasizing technical feats to the point where feeling was overwhelmed. Bourgeois's imagery (at least in her free-standing works) now reads as a signature, a trademark, rather than as evidence of invention or self-discovery. It's all utterly predictable. The only question left is what new combination of materials Bourgeois will have her work manufactured in this season. I used to think she was better than that.

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HERBERT GOLD

A Blazing Incident

Here at last is the true confession of how a big-breasted, dreamy, willing, and psychotic sorority person took advantage of me in the late fifties; and of how I suffered the consequences of sinlessness; and implicitly contained within the body of my avowal, evidence can be found of how the times have improved, thanks mainly to improvement in the times.

First, a short vocabulary lesson from days gone by. *Making out*, *Sorority*, *Pinned*, *Fiancé*, *Girl* . . . Do some of us recall that the word *Saranwrap* could raise a snicker in gatherings small or large? The diaphragm was an unreliable convenience, like the little wheels on luggage. The Pill was a gleam in the eye of a few scientists at Syntex of Mexico. Nevertheless, the impulse to perform acts of love, tenderness, lust, or squirminess had already existed for many a year. How to answer this call of nature?

Through neurosis and psychosis, plus squirming, lusting, tendering, loving.

Could we have the story, please?

Cornell University, high above Cayuga's water, is a cashmere vision of the perfect college campus in any winter of memory. When the snow falls, the carillons in the library tower sound and resound across Quad and gorge, across hillside and against the brick walls of Willard Straight Hall – champion snowqueen music. The sky might be leaden, although memory tends to relinquish this fact, but the wide lawns are white and every cheek is pink. A few ethnic cheeks are dusky.

We grizzled profs in our galoshes and scarves were quaint. The statute of limitations may apply to descriptions of winter campuses, dreamy coeds, winsome faculty, fraternity dances with roaring fires, making out upstairs or in parked cars or no place. I had recently suffered the complicated luck of a divorce, a bout of child support and alimony poverty, depression mingled with elation, an immersion in the Manhattan of young writers studying how to advertise themselves. On smoky afternoons I wanted both in and out. I had been playing touch football in a sidestreet of Manhattan when someone leaned out a window and said Vladimir Nabokov requested I come to the telephone.

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Yes sir, yes sir. Newly rich and famous as the father of *Lolita*, he wished to examine me as his possible replacement when he left Academe for Switzerland, a quieter place. I made the trip to Ithaca by train, was confronted with the ritual committee martinis, digested them correctly, got the job. Suddenly I was reborn with a new title, Visiting Professor, standing on Nabokov's rug in Nabokov's office in Goldwyn Smith Hall. When he departed Ithaca, he left me his annotated copy of Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, which he called "Dr. Van Cliburn."

I was teaching the great man's students, which may have given me something of an aura – son of *Lolita*. But this was not responsible for my troubles. One day a friendly colleague stopped me in the hall with what would be a smirk on the face of someone who was *not* a friend, saying, "Herb. With all the great grownup chicks around here – or even those crazy Hungarian refugees – why choose *her*?"

"Her who?"

"Oh, fella," he said reproachfully, and hurried to his Mallarmé seminar.

Busy with thoughts of Molly Bloom and her lover, Blazes Boyan, among others, I failed to take adequate notice of this passing stab. I was an absent-minded visiting professor.

That night I received another of the peculiar telephone calls which had been interrupting my evenings – a soft female voice: "Yes . . . I'd love to . . . it was so great, I still hurt a lot," and uttering exclamations, whispers, sighs, headlong declarations which reminded me of Molly Bloom's soliloquy from the large lecture class on James Joyce which I had been performing those snowy weeks. *Yes, yes, yes,* she said.

She never mentioned her name.

She kept on calling, answered nothing in response to my interruptions – *who are you? who is this?* – and was still remarking away at a good clip when I hung up. I heard from her only a few times a week; another prank in the midwinter freeze. Students also threw snowballs, caroled outside my window, invited me on ice skating expeditions, sat solemnly debating the relative merits of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *The Horse's Mouth*, and listened to the voice of experience (me). Callow as I was, I liked my new role as groovy (before this word existed – vocabulary note) young professor who didn't always wear a tie to class. Sometimes I left my shirt collar open under the tweed jacket from Brooks Brothers' 346 Shop for economical post-preps. I paid some of my bills. I was busy. Happy days.

One morning, trudging up a hill in the muddy path between snow banks, my green drawstring Harvard-Cornell bag filled with student papers, I met a bundle of fur coming toward me. It stopped, its eyes

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widened and darkened – the classic expression of horror and trepidation in Western literature – she just stood in the snow and stared. Terror was mixed with an emotion I couldn't identify. "Do I know you?" I asked. She shook her head. "Are you in my Joyce lecture?" Another stunned quiver. I paused a moment. "All right, good morning, then."

I'd like to think this caused me to meditate upon the role of young prof, which has its charms for both students and the young prof; surely I was not exempt from swagger, the temptation to appear in the Modern Novel corral with a thumb in my belt and a learned but rakish squint in my eye. The collison of non-tenured cockiness with adolescent dreaminess causes many an unnecessary flash fire. The air on campus was right for it. I'd like to think I had these wise thoughts, but I didn't.

That night the Provost came to see me at Telluride House. It seemed that I was having an affair with a student, her parents were profoundly disturbed, and he himself idly wondered what explanation I could offer. My explanation: it was untrue. He went on: The girl disappeared for nights and weekends to spend them with me in various motels nearby. And, uh, embarrassment, what we did, furthermore, was the sort of thing even married couples didn't do in upper New York State unless they were pretty weird. Around the Finger Lakes, this stuff was only a rumor – he couldn't say about Albany. I denied. Well, her roommate and others had seen her dial my number, heard her conversations with me on the telephone. Ah, I remembered those calls. They were one-sided conversations. She talked dirty and breathed hard, practicing for the modern novel, but I always hung up promptly.

The Provost wanted to know why there wasn't a dial tone. I said maybe there was and the girls didn't hear it. We debated the resonance across a room of disconnect signals and the tympanic acuity, involving helix, fossa of antihelix, concha, antitragus, tragus, external auditory meatus, stapes, eustachian tube, and internal auditory meatus of nineteen-year-old sorority sisters who swore there must have come an answer to Penelope's (for indeed that was her name) sighs and groans. Huffily came my breathing with Charlie Provost. Huffy and indignant was my style on this occasion. I was improvising.

The girl's name meant nothing to me but a name on the register of a large lecture class (there were several Penelopes, Sharons, Lindas, and four Mary Anns); she had never come in for a conference, although her fellow Penelope did; and I had a friend in New York whom I often visited on weekends. This aforesaid lady from New York (defendant's exhibit A) had even traveled up to spend weekends in Ithaca with me. I could produce witnesses to the fact. We had taken beef stroganoff over rice with colleagues on one of the alleged nights of motel acrobatics with the mythomanic, lying, vicious Penelope Whatzername . . .

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"A little calm, Professor Gold, a little respect. Penelope comes of an excellent, generous family."

He seemed to be dislodged slightly by my denials, but here was an additional complication. The young woman's parents were socially prominent and wealthy trustees (or perhaps the word was regents) of the University. They demanded an explanation.

"You mean they want a gallon of my blood?"

"Professor Gold, if you are innocent, as you claim, they may be persuaded to accept less."

I rejected the vision of vampires generously nibbling at my neck – this was not a problem of metaphor. I was about to be fired, cast out in a cloud which would follow me forever. Even if I were innocent, Charlie Provost suggested, why did I have to be innocent of sexual perversions which no healthy person practiced? I demanded a meeting with the girl and her parents.

"Exactly what we had in mind," said the Provost. "The reports of the private detective have been strangely inconclusive."

"They hired one?"

"Yes, of course."

"I wasn't warned?"

"No. Although I believe one of your colleagues was asked . . . "

Try a Hungarian refugee or two . . . "I didn't even know what the devil he was talking about!"

"I suppose it was embarrassing for him, not trained in abnormal behavior – "

"Let's talk straight, Charlie. The private dicks couldn't find anything, but since they thought they knew, and they were hired to prove it – "

"Well, they did speak with some of her friends. They claimed it was productive. I think we had better try to have a meeting."

Innocence thundered at him in a vocabulary which was mild, meek, and non-tenured. "Try. I'd like a meeting as soon as possible."

"Tomorrow," he said. "They have chartered a plane to fly up from Southampton."

We met in the office of the Provost. An indignant baldish, fattish man with an indignant fattish but not baldish wife, overdressed for steam heat, as were we all, seemed to be my fantasy step-inlaws. Their heads looked like ticking pink bombs, waiting to go off when I tripped the wire. I stared at them on a couch opposite the Latin inscription on the diploma – was it for University Administration? – above the Provost's desk. Charles seemed slimmer this morning, smiling, urgently friendly and facilitating. Perhaps he started thin and swelled up with all the hot air he ingested during a day's work. For some reason my curiosity about the girl, my acrobatic partner, held itself in abeyance, as if by some will to

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prolong our foreplay. She sat eagerly between her parents, hot little eyes exploring my every crevice.

What any normal person saw, choosing to look at me, was a man in pain, in owlish hornrims, baggy flannel pants, a Brooks Brothers (346 Shop) tweed jacket, and my best pale blue J. Press shirt. My boss outfit for crucial moments. Shoes scuffed and wet from snow. I tracked a bit of mud into the office, just as I had tracked some mud into the lives of these Southhampton parents.

The girl, the girl, that ribald coed. She was plump. She wore a blue cashmere sweater to match her eyes and the silver fillings of her teeth. She was stacked. A fraternity pin bobbled at the slightly pointed end of one of the stacks. She was pledged. "Hi, Doctor," she said.

The face looked familiar. She was registered in a European Novel lecture course along with about two hundred others. We met in a large room of Goldwyn Smith Hall – a medieval surgery filled with bloody insights – where I rambled through the semester from the *Story of the Rose* to *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary* and *Ulysses* and up through time, reverently, to my predecessor's *Lo Lo Lolita*. He had been known at Cornell as a good writer but a tough grader.

The girl was lobbing cheerful lovelooks at me across the carpeted office. (Administrators have carpets; Nabokov lent me his rug, but rolled it up when he finally left town; profs normally prowl on naked floors.) Enthusiasm and perkiness flowed in little invisible wavelets from the young woman to me. I thought only I could feel the vibration. Her father's elbow jabbed her suddenly, just below the stack with the pin, and she stopped jiggling.

What followed was no inquisition, there was no rack or water torture, no fire on feet or singed fingernails, but I'm here to say it felt rotten. The accused was assumed to be guilty, due to passionate evidence. Penelope said she had been doing all those dirty things with me. Her sorority mates had heard her telephone me, although they couldn't certify the other end of the line. Her parents were armed by single-minded intensity; they cherished their now-dishonored child in a ceremony of revenge. They wanted my head; so did I. Did I suffer memory gaps? Other complicated fellows had performed awful crimes – why not me? I tried to adjust to being a monster, the amnesiac fiend of the Ithaca Hills. I still felt rotten. This was not a literary crime. Punishment was more than a bad review. There would be letters on file, and no more job, farewell to chalk and term papers, and what about my bills? the respect

The accused began to feel guilty. This is a familiar phenomenon. Surely I had dreamed of nubile and submissive students. I struggled to remember the fiery pleasures of Penelope. Was I the sort of criminal who

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hid his crimes even from himself? I slumped into existential trauma. High above Cayuga's waters, I was in the pink of trouble.

At first all I could say was: "*No.*"

"Okay, let's test this out," said impartial, slender, imperceptibly thicker C. Provost. "On which weekends did Professor Gold go, uh, in the . . . hotel with you, Penelope?"

She had a list of weekends, stormy afternoons, terrific midnights.

I had a friend in New York. I had come armed with records of chartering a small plane on one of those weekends – grandiose birthday gesture – and on another my friend from New York was registered at the Faculty Club. The top private eye of Ithaca stated – affadavit on yellow paper – that I was a smart customer who had managed to give him the slip.

"Ah," said the Provost, "so we have here a puzzle."

Perhaps, Dr. Watson, but Visiting Professor Sherlock has the answer: THE GIRL IS NUTS.

"And has anyone ever seen you with Professor Gold?" the Provost asked.

"Oh no, of course not, that would just ruin his reputation," she answered. "The doctor said we could never be seen together, never, ever, never. But our love was all the deeper."

"Ah. He said that." She nodded vigorously. "But then could anybody verify by ocular analysis" – he turned to the parents: "*Seeing* – that Professor Gold and you . . . ?"

"Of course not, such would be impossible," she said. "But our love would be – "

"Yes, yes, of course," said the Provost. "All the deeper. Yuh."

"And he tried to do almost the same thing with another girlfriend of mine. That made me so mad."

"Who?" I asked. "Who, who, who?"

She named the friend. I had never heard of her. Penelope said: "He stopped her in the snow, touched her hair, and asked her for her telephone number. That really burned me up. That really teed me off. He stroked her hair so softly, so gently, like he used to stroke mine."

"Get that girl in here," I said.

"That's my thought too," said the Provost, "and in fact, we have arranged for her to join us."

He buzzed his secretary. "Sirocco, please." I wondered why he hadn't told me about this in advance. I was surrounded by enemies. The door opened.

She turned out to be Penelope's roommate, Sirocco Jones, and now I remembered her. It was the girl paralyzed by the Gorgon sight of my face in the snow on the slope near Willard Straight Hall. She had just

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heard such things, such things, and there I stood, the very sex maniac Penelope had just been discussing.

"Tell," said Penelope, a little hasty, "how Professor Gold, Herbert, the doctor here stopped you in the snow and touched your hair and asked for your telephone number."

"Um," said Sirocco.

I was shooting truth looks into her. My mighty I.Q. was concentrated in my burning eyes. (They were burning due to a recent case of nervous conjunctivitis.) The mad doctor (B.A., M.A., no Ph.D.) covered her helpless body, bound head and foot by sorority bull session traditions, with reality caresses. No Kappa Psi girl should ever be asked to undergo such an ordeal. Poor innocent Sirocco.

"Tell, cross your heart," commanded Penelope.

"Well, I didn't say that," said Sirocco.

"What?"

"What I said, I think I said, was you had just finished telling me all about him, the Professor, and . . . and there he was, and – and he stopped in the snow – "

"She stopped bolt and stared at me," I said.

"He *looked* at my hair as if he wanted to stroke it, and if he asked for my telephone number I might have given it to him, because you're my roommate and all, and this is the most exciting thing that almost ever happened to me, and – "

The Provost was very gentle with her. She was a customer and I was an employee. "Thank you very much, Sirocco, that's a nice name you have, too – "

"My mom told me there was this terrific wind storm when they . . . and it inspired them . . . and so when I came along, the blessed event, they – "

"Thank you very much, Sirocco. You may go to your class now."

She gathered up her books, lay them aslant against her own cashmered stack, and slipped away, leaving a faint aura of Blue Grass mixed with Rum.

As a quasi-judicial proceeding, this trial had a quasi-form. The Provost sighed. He looked at everyone individually, dominating us with mind and rank. The parents had the advantage over him of indignation and money. I had the slight advantage of innocence. Penelope had youth, cuteness, and psychosis going for her. All he had was the tradition of university administration. "Is there something you would like to add, Penelope?" he gently inquired.

"I wanted to study Humanity with him," she said. "That's what I wanted most in life."

"Humanities," I said. "There's a difference. There's no course in

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Humanity," – but the bobble of the fraternity pin on the tip-top pinnacle denied my previous statement. There must be a course in Humanity.

"Do you have any imaginary friends?" the Provost asked her.

"Never. I used to think I did, but not anymore."

"Do you have any real friends?"

"I'm a sister of Kappa Psi."

He nodded. What he was giving her now was time. This takes a moment. She looked clear and bright and well-nourished by the attention.

"So perhaps," said the Provost, "what happened to you was entirely real in your mind, but imaginary for people who lack your, uh, imagination."

Penelope gazed at me. Her eyes were pennies – no change possible.

"Do I have to drop the course?"

"No, but I'll not read your term paper. My reader will give you a grade."

"I'm writing this really neat paper about Thomas Mann, I think. I wish you would look at it, Doctor. Didn't he write 'The Magical Mountain?'"

The Provost turned to the parents. Their expressions – indignation, inner heat, solidarity forever – had not yet registered the altered conditions of this trial. "I believe Professor Gold is satisfied. Are you, Sir?"

"Just one thing," said Penelope's father. I realized her mother had not spoken a word. "I'd like an apology from Doctor Gold."

"For what?"

"For implying that my daughter should see a psychiatrist."

A moment later, after the fit was over, why was the Provost wrestling me back into my chair, why were my J. Press shirt and 346 Shop jacket wet with sweat, why was my tongue bleeding? Apparently I had attempted to leap upon the parents, but the quick-thinking university administrator had foreseen this reaction and stopped me with a hammerlock and a cocked knee before I could move more than a few inches into the mote-laden, steam-heated, winter air. He was now moving us on to our next stations in life, our duties to perform.

"Thank you very much for coming to this conference. You may go now." Perhaps T. Charles Provost had other problems to solve. He stood at the door. Penelope, her pin afloat, stopped in front of me and touched her nipple with its burden of fraternity emblem. "My fiantz" – fee-antz – "is furious," she said.

Her mother, a handkerchief to her nose, followed her out. Her father followed both of them. The provost gazed at me, nodded, and I followed in a moment. The door shut behind me.

Now it's been twenty-five years since that door closed, but I can still

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hear the click as I waited to give the little family ahead of me a chance to go its own way. Penelope is in her forties by now. Surely she has grown children by her forgiving fiantz. Nabokov is no longer writing in the Montreux-Palace Hotel in Switzerland. I am back on a campus, admiring the California girls with their long clean blond hair and their bicycles and their easy ways. In the enchanted forests of Academe, the statute of limitations on telemouth chatter never expires. Recently a speaker on campus, visiting California to give his prize lecture, asked me: "Hey, Herb, long time no see, you look terrific, kid, whatever happened to that girl you had an affair with at Cornell and it caused so much trouble?"

Coming in

Partisan Review

- **Vassily Aksyonov:** *A Winged Endangered Species*
- **Doris Lessing:** On Feminism
- **Irving Louis Horowitz:** On Morris R. Cohen
- **Anatole Broyard:** A Memoir
- **Pearl K. Bell:** Fiction Chronicle
- **Elizabeth Dalton:** On Henry James
- **Sergei Dovlatov:** Fiction
- **George Stade:** On Lionel Trilling

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CLANCY SIGAL

Goodbye Little England

Author's Note: I wrote this as I was packing my bags to go back to America for the first time, seriously, in over thirty years. In Britain, my adopted homeland, Mrs. Thatcher was still vibrantly, or virulently, in charge at the time of writing. I'm not sure what the country under the new Prime Minister, John Major, is like, except that almost everyone I know is poorer in pocket and possibly even sorrier in spirit now that The Great She has departed . . . but for how long? At the moment, Mr. Major enjoys a remarkably good press. The Opposition has not yet laid a glove on him; he is still untested in the sort of bruising up-the-slippery ladder struggle that shaped Mrs. Thatcher. But nothing much has changed. There is still the eternal squabble over whether Britain is a European nation or not. And the U. K. still is the cutting edge of post-industrial decay, the nation that – if we but heard her cries – could teach us much about the surly graces of capitalist catastrophe.

What did Karl Marx and Freud have in common? They both slept with their housekeepers. It's taken me thirty years to figure this out. Suddenly, the two mental giants who have ruled my life come into sharper focus. It's exhilarating, and also shattering, for your gods to fail. At last, it's time to grow up.

I did it all here, in Britain.

And now it's time to go. Back to the United States, where I'm a *gastarbeiter*, a "guest worker," in my own country. Going where the money is, and where a jobbing writer like me can be a "Professor of Journalism" without blushing. It's not only the gravy. A sense of timing maybe. Or the intolerable London rents, abysmal telephones, unpredictable weather, Northern Line blues, fat smug Chancellors of the Exchequer telling us to tighten our belts. Or an old longshore lament that's been ringing in my ears recently: it's time to go, I heard them say/ I heard them say, It's time to go . . . for now.

It was only an interlude, I told myself. A weekend to visit the Tower of London and Buckingham Palace, a few days extra to see Stratford-on-Avon and the Lake District. Then back to Hollywood where J. Edgar Hoover's FBI waited patiently for me to break. "You'll cooperate," they'd predicted. "They all do—in the end."

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"Cooperation" meant informing on my friends, ex-Communist Party comrades, and co-workers. In the McCarthyite 1950's, "everybody" submitted who wanted, as I did, to make it in the movie business. I didn't trust myself not to be a stoolpigeon. A hot blowtorch to my naked feet I might have heroically withstood. But not the promise that I could keep my name on the office door, my two secretaries and Christmas bonus I'd left behind on Sunset Strip. How many Chicago kids get to call Humphrey Bogart and Ava Gardener by their first names?

My English interlude lasted thirty years. And I never did see the Tower. But almost everything else in Britain took – as is the habit of visiting Americans, from Mark Twain and T.S. Eliot to the Eighth Air Force GIs – my name. If "Kilroy," the mythical World War Two trooper, could scrawl himself on walls and fences all over Blitzed Britain, so could I. You had given us Tom Paine, the 1776 Revolutionary War best-selling pamphleteer. I'd repay the compliment almost two hundred years later. After all, I thought, your 1945 postwar "revolution" needed, as ours had, a bit of foreign enthusiasm too. And maybe I, like Tom, could become a literary celebrity abroad. Only one small detail needed working out. I had to learn the writing trade.

It couldn't be that hard. The first writers I met were, at first glance, astonishingly normal people. Alan Sillitoe, John Wain, Angus Wilson, Doris Lessing, Mervyn Jones, John Osborne, V.S. Pritchett, Colin MacInnes, Bernard Kops, Robert Bolt, Laurie Lee seemed incredibly gray and downbeat compared to boisterous types I admired like Jack Kerouac and Norman Mailer. You had to be "interesting" to write good prose, surely.

That was my second lesson. Ordinary people wrote exciting work, exciting people somehow forgot to put it in their writing. It seemed unfair. I thought I was a hell of a lot more "interesting" than the writers I met, but they had the trick while I was still knocking about the country getting into fights, combatively squaring off against writers who seemed deeply bored by my posturing. Damn their eyes, I'd show 'em.

It was also a clash of literary traditions. Yours was Shakespeare, Fielding, Trollope, Dickens, etcetera. Mine was Superman, Tarzan, the Lone Ranger, Gene Kelly and John Wayne. When a stranger strolls into town, pardner, he either guns down his rivals or dances off with Cyd Charisse. Once, I bulldozed my way into tea with E. M. Forster at Kings College, Cambridge. He politely listened to my complaints about London literary life, then quietly observed: "Yes, I quite see your point. I'm afraid we're not in the slightest like Paris or Rome or New York. Perhaps you should try one of those places next. Another biscuit?"

But I'd already tried New York and Paris, and I couldn't speak Italian. So I launched my writing life in Thurcroft, outside Rotherham by

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way of Sheffield, South Yorkshire.

A hungry writer with his back against the ropes will lash out with everything he has. I was lucky enough to meet a coal-face collier named Len Doherty, also a writer, who understood my hunger because he too was famished for escape. We collaborated on my first book, *Weekend in Dinlock*, although only my name appeared on it. I wrote it but he opened his village, his pit and himself to me. When I showed him my final manuscript, he shoved it back across the pub table and said, "It'll make thy reputation, lad. But it won't solve thy problems. God Almaghty couldn't help the likes of us."

"Us" was a Chicago corner boy and a Yorkshire handgetter in temporary alliance against "Them" – not only the English upper class which was our formal enemy but also a whole world of cosmopolitan sophisticates centered in London, who drove us mad with their double signals of praise and patronization. Angry, trapped (we felt) in a kind of claustrophobic clumsiness, steeped in the different prides of our respective working classes – he Geordie, me Russian-Jewish – we often took it out on each other. We had one or two terrible fist fights in the dark lanes of Thurcroft after pub closing. Finally, almost laughing with exhaustion, he collapsed against me one night in the Miners Club. "What do tha want of us, man? If tha stay much longer, one or both of us'll end up in hospital. Go home, Yank."

But I didn't, or couldn't, go "home.'

"You Red worms sure been crawling out of the woodwork ever since that damn Negro crooner fooled the judges he wasn't a Commie. Here's your new passport – and you can go to hell with it," angrily spat a Second Secretary at the U.S. Embassy in Grosvenor Square as he almost threw the prized document at me. The Supreme Court had just ruled that the singer-actor Paul Robeson could not be denied a valid passport simply because of his radical opinions. The court's decison suddenly released me from a curiously clandestine life I'd led since coming to Britain as a passportless, blacklisted "McCarthy refugee." Finally, I was free to go home – but where was that?

Somehow, while dodging Home Office snoops, sleeping in open fields and in railway guards' vans if I didn't have money for a ticket, brazenly knocking on strangers' doors in places that tickled my fancy, stopping a night with a friendly newspaper editor or (yes) policeman willing to give me a hot cuppa on a freezing night, I'd become less American. Not British or English. More Yanklish.

And as its gray soot rubbed off on me, a Londoner.

I tried going back to the States. But so much had happened there, so few of my gloomy predictions were proving true, that I slunk back to England with a relieved sense that here, thank God, things stayed the

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same or evolved at a human pace. But then the Sixties happened. A kind of fever – Harold Wilson called it the "white heat of technological revoluton" – gripped the country. I first sensed it when many of the Northeast coal fields shut. One day, it seemed, I was drinking in some of the liveliest workingmen's clubs in Britain; the next, nothing but ghost towns. A Labour government had persuaded a whole region to die, with hardly a peep from the union or the miners who trusted "their" Party.

I barely noticed the other symptoms because they weren't the sort of "political" issues I was used to protesting about. Like the coal fields around Newcastle and Durham, whole neighborhoods I'd known in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and Birmingham simply "were disappeared," as if they were Latin American dissidents. A motorway rammed parts of my Notting Hill, where I lived, into the dust. Ancient city centres were replaced by shopping precincts that give carbuncles a bad name. The shires were handcuffed to amalgamated counties with artificial names and lunatic boundaries (Humberside, Tyne and Wear, Tameside, etc.). Rutland just vanished. Lord Beeching merrily slashed away at the railways that had been my lifeline to the regions. Labour's Harold Wilson, Tony Benn and Barbara Castle (who began phasing out the brilliantly engineered Routemaster buses for the present one-person-only disasters), all premature Thatcherites, were out to remake Britain in a kind of weird, Dr. Who vision of a think-tanker's idea of John F. Kennedy's Camelot which never existed anyway.

And it was all so bloody inefficient.

In the sixties, I changed from being John Reed, the U. S. radical journalist, to Colonel Blimp. Because that's when I began to realize how important the best of the old was to me and how much I despised the unworkable new. Worst of all for a second-generation socialist, it dawned on me how much Party labels were a nonsense when it came to real life. Once again I plunged into a political wilderness from which I've yet to emerge.

Today, I remain a Labour activist in roughly the same way I'm a Jew. I hardly think about my Jewishness except around anti-Semites. And Margaret Thatcher has remade me into a fundamentalist socialist because Labour is the most conservative party around.

It's been a long, long road from Sunset Boulevard to Primrose Hill N.W.1. Yet, now that I'm gearing up to be an American again, I'm sometimes not sure which country I'm in. A loony type of "Americanization" – American greed without Yankee zip, "style" without stylishness, money without a guilty conscience – is taking hold. A myth of a flourishing suburban family replaces all the other myths that held us together. The aspidistra is no longer flying, it's going by Concorde.

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In a way, I love it. "Thatcherism" – really, Wilson/Callaghanism with a blue rinse – exploded long-unused energies in me. I'm one of the few socialists I know who had an excellent business-school training and survived in a cut-throat commercial game. I actually enjoy corporate life . . . up to a point, Lord Copper. But not when it radicalizes British life to where there doesn't seem to be a truly significant difference between what I left in America and what I came here for.

Don't mistake me. I'm not one of those American tourists who wearisomely insist Britain is more "civilized" than the U. S. A. I've met more physical violence here – from police, strangers and even friends – than in America. Right from the start, when I got off the boat at Southampton to an unofficial TGWU dockers' strike ("Carry yer own, mate – wotcha think, we're yer coolies?") to my first demo at Trafalgar Square, a head kicking from a winklepickered Mosleyite, I knew that the boxer 'Enry Cooper more than Winnie the Pooh was likely to be a household god. This is an unarmed, not a nonviolent, country.

So what kept me here? During my first crisis winter of no central heating and caff bangers that should have been left buried at Stonehenge, I fell in love with the thing we most despise today – seediness, the war-wounded shabbiness, the unhurried, undramatic sense of getting-on-with-it despite. Britain in the late 1950s looked pretty worn down but was surprisingly efficient.

Work got done, things got mended, with an unself-conscious dispatch that now seems quaint. It didn't look "modern," God knows I hated the inconveniences, but buses and trains moved, 999 calls were answered, shopkeepers fumbled and mumbled in their musty backrooms but found the item you wanted. I'm no antiquarian. I don't like England because it's an historical museum. Dirt and squalor masquerading as "tradition" repel me. But I'm hopelessly addicted to things that work – and Britain's streets once were swept.

I value Little England. For some, this means gin and tonic on the verandah at sunset, Lord Kitchener's accusing finger and Liverpool F. C. supporters having a murderous go at the wogs at Heysel. It's that, all right. But small-country patriotism doesn't have to be a right-wing monopoly. It can be provincial, even insular, suspicious of outsiders and belligerent toward intellectuals like me. But there's something else to it. Call it resistance or stroppiness: what makes life here positive, regenerative, alive. I wish I could say it was simple love of country except that that's pretty complicated nowadays. I happen to feel idiotically patriotic about both the U. S. A. and Britain. Remembrance Sunday has become as important to me as my own Memorial Day. I felt bloody foolish the other day being the only person in Regents Park to pause in silence when, suddenly, from the direction of the Zoo, "Last Post" was sounded

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at 11 a.m. on November 11th.

My Remembrance Sunday also includes the casualties of class. Not just the martyrs of Peterloo, Tolpuddle and the 1926 General Strike. The "class system" that's evolved here is dreadfully hurtful to everybody. Among other things, it means that working-class people often half-destroy themselves making the exhausting leap from Class 4 and 5 to 3 and beyond. And the middle classes get penned up in a psychic ghetto at once snobbish and guilt-ridden. Maybe that's changing now. The Norman Tebbits are supposed to be sweeping away the Lord Carringtons in a Thatcherite "revolution of the talents." People more like myself are in control. I'm not sure I like it.

Britain's on the move again, in one of those great modernizing convulsions like the Land Enclosures and the Victorian railway boom. It's quite exciting if you don't get knocked down by the traffic. I wish I could stay to report some of it. The cities and shires, so ruthlessly bombarded by the architect-planner Luftwaffe, are starting to fight back. Even Merseyside scouses are, against their nature, cheering up a little. None of us knows what Britain is or will be anymore. Whether we like it or not, "she" has given us a clear historical choice, as De Gaulle once did in France. Each of us has to work out for himself all over again the kind of people we are and what is important to us. Something's definitely in the air when a polo-playing prince makes bolder statements than my old New Left used to.

I actively yearn for a Britain now fading away like old fax paper. It was never "One Nation." What country ever is? Yet I always wanted it to be. Maybe it comes from seeing *Mrs. Miniver* and *In Which We Serve* in my soft-minded teens: movie fantasies of a whole, healthy people. Despite everything, I've never quite lost this American romance of a renewed, more generous Britain. Meantime, I fight the class war like everyone else.

Like most ex-workingclass socialists I know, I try to defend the class I'm from rather than the one I'm in. Americans call characters like me a "tweenie," a demographic half-caste. Privately I'm proud of inching up from Lucozade to Perrier, but troubled I couldn't take everyone else with me. "Rise with, not from, your class," my mother used to say. She believed we all deserved champagne. She would not have been sympathetic to my confused longing to stick with my own. Surer of her own roots, she took 'em as she found 'em. Her more relaxed attitude to class has for me turned to something harder and more bitter here. It's almost a relief to return to"classless" America where money talks without worrying about dropping its *aitches*.

Class distinctions seldom bothered my mother, a machine minder. "Common" was almost the worst thing she could say about a person –

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or me at my commonest. She hated mean vulgarity. But I think she would have understood why I keep going back to certain grimy, breathtakingly lovely landscapes in the North. I'm not into industrial archaeology. But Sigal's Guide to Beautiful Britain lists Tyneside, the Mersey piers and Hull docks, Glasgow's Clyde, Port Talbot, the moors above Huddersfield and Bradford – as well as those amazing examples of interracial coexistence, Manchester's Moss Side and Liverpool 8 – as national treasures to be cherished alongside Blenheim and Hampton Court.

Whole regions of my life are now either wastelands or sub-bohemias for bad poets and displaced earth mothers running Little Shops of Horrors called boutiques. Step by step one part of Britain grows at the expense of another; provincialism at its best is replaced by false urbanity; people start to have second lives like second homes by wiping out a past that is a common heritage. I saw it happen in America once.

Nostalgia, like literacy, has its uses. Sometimes at the U.S. Air Force cemetery in Cambridge I see combat-crew veterans trying to explain to puzzled wives and bored kids what a dogfight was like. It becomes terribly important to recall Mike and Charlie and Vic lying there under white crosses or Stars of David in the Fen snow. They're the part of us we have to remember to stay alive as human beings.

My ghosts are more earthbound: the Barnsley and Merthyr miners, Blackburn mill hands, Coventry auto workers and CIU clubmen – ostensibly racist and anti-foreign – who let me in with an openheartedness I failed to find in London. Here and there, in a mining village or (former) textile town, I'm still Kilroy among the survivors. Well, almost. "No, lad, can't say I do remember you," a South Yorkshire retired checkweighman recently told me in a pub that had once been my second home. "Or that Doherty fellow. Was you that Yank who was always asking questions and couldn't hold our beer? Heard you died – or went to America. Same thing, if you ask me."

This "other" Britain hardly exists any more. Its trench-warfare mentality and naked maleness are unfashionable today. The hard shoulders are being removed from the road to Wigan Pier. It had its middle-class counterpart, mainly among those who were under fire in World War Two. I can excuse a sloppy drunk in my local a lot if he was at Arnhem or Kohima. Or a woman who became another kind of casualty in the Blitz. It was a long, tedious, dangerous war . . . we forget.

My first serious woman friend here once spat, "Stop romanticizing us, especially the workers. They're like any of us – they'd move up in a moment if they thought they could." It sounds briskly unsentimental but isn't always true. Little Englandism sometimes also involves class loyalty. My own has been burned and hammered away – by crazy strikes, embarrassment at the difference in outlooks, relief that I don't have to live that

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way any more. All that remains is a dim, dumb, almost soldierly sense that, back there somewhere, I left behind some remarkable people. And a culture of poverty that bred strength as well as misery, broad sympathies inseparable from mindless cruelties – and a sophistication about gut realities completely alien to my present N.W.1 neighbors.

Don't tell me about the ugly side. I covered the trial of the Moors Murderers, Brady and Hindley. They're as authentic to the northern working class as Coronation Street or Richard Hoggart. And so is Bradford's Jack the Ripper. I know what mean bastards the proles can be. One foggy night in Islington the No. 38 bus I was riding ran over a drunk, breaking his leg. A decent middle class woman spread her expensive-looking coat over the shivering man in the street. "Wouldn't do that if I was you, miss," advised the bus driver enjoying a fag while waiting for someone else to ring 999 for an ambulance. "He might piss on it."

No English middle-class person would have dealt with a victim as my No. 38 bus driver did. Give them the right kind of crisis – Dunkirk, a motor accident, a train or air crash – and they're magnificent. Once I recovered from a spinal operation by taking a Swan Hellenic cruise through the Aegean. My fellow passengers – Eton/Rodean-bred or nearly so – were super to me because I was acceptably disabled. But they were the same people who coldly, cruelly, snubbed another passenger who had the wrong accent and drank too much. Funny, that. "Joe" was an ex-RAF Spitfire pilot. He was more tolerant of the snobs than I. "Ease up, lad," Joe told me one boozy night under a Corinth moon. "I understand that lot. They want me to be like one of the Few. Instead, I behave like all of The Many." He roared with vodka-and-tonic laughter. "If I was a railwayman like my Dad they'd forgive me, you see."

Joe wasn't my idea of a proper Battle of Britain hero. They wore white scarves and said "Tallyho!" as they flew into the Messerschmitt-darkened sun. Somehow, I confused Richard Hilary, burning alive in his Spitfire, with my idol, Roger Bannister, who broke the four-minute mile (I was a mere 440 runner), with Leslie Howard in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* with Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*: brave toffs, on my side. I'm probably as much a product of John Buchan and Gainsborough Studios as Marx and Freud. My saints may be proletarian, but my heroes certainly are bourgeois.

And now I'm going back to a country where men are called Sparky, Smoky and Spunky . . . where not a soul will know what I mean by Clause 4, devolution, Arthur Scargill, and elevenses . . . where I'll have to be polite to everybody not because "it's done" but because of my fear they'll shoot me over a parking space . . . where a Bill of Rights guarantees I'll never again have one of my books banned . . . where sane

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people can say America is God's Country without blushing . . . where blacks and browns fight for equality but not for simple recognition of their existence . . . where I'm billed (as I was) $3,000 for fainting in the street . . . California dentists look into my mouth and mutter "Yeah, I heard all about your socialized medicine, it'll cost you a bomb to fix that mess" . . . where a twenty-nine-cent stamp is enough to unlock my FBI file . . . where football players get the Nobel Prize for ordinary tackles and backslapping compliments is the preferred method of "interpersonal interaction" . . . where measured detachment is a sign either of insanity or TV punditry but not of friendship . . . friends make dates for breakfast tomorrow not dinner four months hence . . . an unpaid bill is a cause less of concern than jail . . . and where I was born.

The change I tried to escape in America has finally caught up with me, and there's a new Britain we're inventing. Len Doherty killed himself, nobody wants to know his name any more, not even in Thurcroft. It's made me feel suddenly lonely. Once it was the two of us against "Them," but now I'm almost one of them myself. I wonder if Len, too tired to go down to pit again but strangely out of place in his new whitecollar class, felt any of this. There must be a laugh in it somewhere. After all, why live here unless you pick up a trace of the famed English sense of humor – essentially a kiss before dying, a bemused appreciation of just how bloody hard it is to stay sane on this crowded little island?

There's a brilliant rainbow over Chalk Farm as I write this after a sleety rain. Cheap symbolism. After all, there will be rainbows in L. A. or New York or wherever I go. But it won't be quite the same. For thirty years – half my life – I've lived on the lower slopes of Jerusalem we call democratic socialism, or welfarism, Labourism, or simply the English sickness. An extraordinary experience of misery, ecstasy, broken promises, structural decency, and shallow compromises – neither all-out capitalism nor "true" socialism. You're a midway people, halfway between America and Russia, heaven and hell. This delicate, often dispiriting balance can be maddening. And I really did go crazy here, in love, for fraternity, with comrades who nearly killed me and women who sometimes I wish had. Anyone who calls this place "sane" is nuts.

But no more grumbles. You don't reward the lifeguard who saved you from drowning by reminding him he should have sent you home in a Porsche. I don't want to go. But needs must. I'll be back. After all, would Marx have turned his back on a "revolution," Thatcherite or otherwise, or Freud have ignored a country where repression is such an art form? But then, they could afford housekeepers.

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BOOKS

DeLillo's World

AMERICANA. Random House. $7.95.
END ZONE. Penguin. $8.95.
GREAT JONES STREET. Random House. $7.95.
LIBRA. Viking. $19.95.
MAO II. Viking. $19.95.
THE NAMES. Random House. $11.00.
PLAYERS. Alfred A. Knopf. $7.95.
RATNER'S STAR. Random House. $8.95.
RUNNING DOG. Alfred A. Knopf. $7.95.
WHITE NOISE. Viking. $16.95.
By Don DeLillo.

The novels of Don DeLillo can make your skin crawl. On a day when a gunman in Texas has randomly killed twenty-two people in a cafeteria, and a water-main break in mid-Manhattan has plunged the city into chaos, the world, lacerated by disaster and mayhem, bullets and blood, crazies everywhere, seems to be turning into a novel by Don DeLillo. DeLillo is a voluptuary of paranoia, a connoisseur of dread who draws his themes, characters, and incidents from what he calls "the daily jostle," where the banality of the commonplace is convulsed by terror and catastrophe.

DeLillo, born in 1936, is the son of Italian immigrants, grew up in the Bronx, and was educated in parochial schools and at Fordham. Yet his ethnic background and Catholic upbringing are entirely absent from his work. He is that very rare American writer who has no use for the resources of personal memory and is most at home in the here and now. Some brief parts of *Libra* (1988), DeLillo's fictional account of Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassination, take place in the Bronx, but only because Oswald and his mother lived there for a while. There are no Italian families in *Libra*. The deliberately willed deracination that DeLillo imposed on his fiction from the beginning is the strong undercurrent running through all his work.

In the ten novels he has published since 1971, DeLillo has ranged over an astonishingly diverse assemblage of American types: football players (*End Zone*, 1972), rock stars (*Great Jones Street*, 1973), mad scientists (*Ratner's Star*, 1976, his one work of science fiction), television executives (*Americana*, 1971), expatriate businessmen and visionary archaeologists (*The Names*, 1982), college professors (*White Noise*, 1985), and a drifter named Lee Harvey Oswald (*Libra*, 1988). Yet all these figures, different

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though they are, appear to inhabit the same obsessional landscape of fear and cataclysm.

Equally, DeLillo has concentrated, with a sort of repelled fascination, on a cluster of contemporary phenomena that turn up again and again in various guises: the pop culture of movies, television, advertising, and rock which he described in *The Names* as an "enormous rot and glut and glare"; supermarkets and shopping malls; desperately loveless sex in squalid motels; the insidious tentacles of technology ("Someone is after you," warns a vicious ex-CIA agent in *Running Dog*, "the computers maybe, the machine-police"); terrorism; violent death; the CIA; natural and man-made disasters; and, the thread on which he strings all his fixations, conspiracy. ("This is the age of conspiracy," says the journalist Moll Robbins in *Running Dog*.)

Conspiracy, in DeLillo's feverishly suspicious imagination, is the central, serpentine fact of modern life, "the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted . . . All conspiracies are the same taut story of men who find coherence in some criminal act." Thus it is criminals of many persuasions who control the action in most of his novels. And, as he remarks in *White Noise*, since "all plots [in all senses of that word] tend to move deathward," DeLillo's conspiracies inevitably end in blood. A particularly nasty conspiracy rears its hydra-head in *Running Dog*, in which smut merchants and buyers are involved in a plot to find the film of an orgy allegedly shot in Hitler's bunker during the last hours of the war. The bestiary of conspirators hot on the trail of the film, and all too ready to kill for it, includes some diabolical ex-spooks, a dealer in porn, and a corrupt senator with a vast collection of dirty art.

DeLillo presses his point hard in *Running Dog*: the world of degenerates and crooks is not an aberrant mutation in the underground of American life but enmeshed in its essential being. Their machinations are oiled by our "superabundance of technology," which, the novelist implies, "makes us feel we're committing crimes." But the mood of *Running Dog* is so unmitigatedly nasty, devoid of a single redeeming thought or person, that although we do shudder, we do not believe. The vision of contemporary America in this novel is such an unrelieved black hole of plots and secrets that after a point it seems not so much inexorable as demented. Even when DeLillo draws his material, as he does in *Libra*, from real persons and the historical record; even when, in *White Noise*, he attempts a comic romp of sorts about American suburbia, the atmosphere is sinister, thick with menace, drenched in intimations of death, and hurtles toward a bloody finale.

A writer in the grip of premonitory obsessions can sometimes feel

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exhausted by their insistent pressure. Perhaps this is why DeLillo decided to take a sabbatical in 1982 from his usual fixations and grim preoccupations. In *The Names*, the only one of his novels with a foreign setting – Greece in the main, then the Middle East, and finally India – DeLillo trained his intense curiosity and considerable erudition on such matters as archaeology, linguistics, Hindu mysticism, the history of alphabets, and the nature of cults. What is most haunting about *The Names* is DeLillo's graphic rendering of the color and air of the Greek landscape; the polluted bustle of Athens; the jagged, stony desolation of the rugged region of southern Greece called the Mani; and the uneasy world of American businessmen in unstable countries, working under the constant threat of terrorism.

The narrator is an American "risk analyst," James Axton, based in Athens, who gathers information for multinational corporations about the conditions in various countries that might lead to terrorist attacks on their employees. In the course of the story, Axton happens upon a cult of wandering assassins who choose their victims by matching initials with place names, and the cult's murderous use of names leads DeLillo in turn to lengthy meditations about language: its sources, its magic, its vanishing purity. Neither the cult nor the circumlocutory observations about language yield their meaning completely – they remain, in fact, maddeningly obscure much of the time. Nor can DeLillo resist ending the novel with the terrorist murder of an American executive and Axton's discovery that his supposedly independent company is an arm of the CIA. Nonetheless, *The Names* brilliantly attests to DeLillo's stylistic virtuosity, his nimble control of difficult subjects, and it is atmospherically the most engrossing of his books.

Yet DeLillo's passions are most insistently engaged with America, and in *White Noise* he returned to his familiar obsessions about his familiar fictional territory: "large and reduplicating" cities like Washington, Dallas, and New York, as well as the suburban hinterland; shabby apartments and motels; glittering supermarkets stuffed to the rafters with the gaudy fruits of excess. Within these drab settings lies the America of consumerist junk and detritus, including the arrogantly deceptive television images that rain down mercilessly on innocent and guilty alike, feeding their appetite for disaster. In *White Noise*, which lifted DeLillo out of relative obscurity when it won a National Book Award in 1985, he launched his most caustic attack on what he regards as a grungy, overfed culture soaked in brand-names and advertising slogans, "the everyday drift of effluents, pollutants, contaminants and delirients." All the characters appear to live in a state of greedy hysteria exacerbated by their constant

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shopping sprees. In her sleep a precocious adolescent murmurs her Madison Avenue mantra, "Toyota Celica, Toyota Corolla, Toyota Cressida," and her father, overhearing the chant, thinks: "Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise."

The father is Jack Gladney, a professor of Hitler Studies in a quiet town. (Hitler again!) Gladney's colleague Murray Siskind, a Jew from New York, wants "to immerse myself in American magic and dread," and gives popular courses in car crashes and comic books. When a poisonous black cloud, which quickly acquires the television label, "The Airborne Toxic Event," suddenly floats over the town and menaces its inhabitants, Murray feels that his craving for dread has been satisfied. But even when the cloud floats away, Gladney is sure he's ingested a lethal dose of poison, and he becomes possessed not only by a fear of death but by anxious certainty that disaster itself has become indispensable to Americans afflicted with media overload: "We need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information . . . Words, pictures . . . Only a catastrophe gets our attention." His comment recalls the football player Gary Harkness in DeLillo's second novel, *End Zone*, who cannot stop thinking about the prospect of nuclear war and gorges his inflamed imagination with "words and phrases like thermal hurricanes . . . post-attack environment, stark deterrence, dose-rate contours," and similar euphemisms. In *White Noise* the Gladney family spends Friday evenings "steeped happily in disaster," silently staring at horrible happenings on television while they eat "take-out Chinese."

Though DeLillo would seem to have conceived *White Noise* as a slyly pointed domestic comedy, it's too barbed with sardonic irony to be funny. The characters are two-dimensional cartoons, not credibly human, and DeLillo's acute state of deracination deprives us of any facts about the Gladneys beyond the stark immediacy of this moment, which turns them into a grotesque inversion of Dick-and-Jane fables about middle-class America. Indeed, in most of DeLillo's novels the characters are drawn as faceless ciphers devoid of recognizably ordinary physical and emotional traits. Though they are unfailingly articulate, they are voices, not persons – voices enacting DeLillo's demonic obsessions.

Only in *Libra* does actuality intercede, enabling the characters of Lee Harvey Oswald, his mother, and Jack Ruby to become fully realized and believable. "All plots tend to move deathward": the theme is the recurrent constant of DeLillo's work. Given his infatuation with covert intrigue and dangerous secrets, it was inevitable that he would be drawn to the assassination of President Kennedy and the short unhappy life of Lee Harvey Oswald. How could DeLillo's conspiratorial imagination stay

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away from a national nightmare that has generated countless tangled theories to explain the murder in Dallas? The author's note in *Libra*, describing the novel as "a work of imagination," disclaims any attempt "to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination." What he does furnish, beyond the historical reality of Lee Harvey Oswald, is an invented horde of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, Mafia big shots, and, most prominently, underground CIA operatives, bitter about the Bay of Pigs fiasco, who concoct a plot outside the rules to win Cuba back.

It was these imagined conspirators, and DeLillo's rejection of the lone-gunman theory, that incurred the wrath of some conservative journalists and critics who condemned *Libra* as "an act of literary vandalism and bad citizenship," and impeached his "ostentatiously gloomy view of American life and society." Whatever one may think of these charges, DeLillo's critics overlooked his genuine achievement in the book: his brilliant re-creation of the dismal life of Lee Oswald, his appalling mother, Marguerite, and that deranged and sordid avenger, the strip-club owner Jack Ruby. With a flawless ear, DeLillo perfectly captures Marguerite Oswald's daffy talk, as when she complains: "They talk and make up stories, which I am not surprised . . . They say I fly off too quick on the handle." He gives us a chilling idea of how destructive a mother she was.

Yet even in this most skillfully drawn of DeLillo's novels, he cannot abstain from driving his indictment of America to a fanatical extreme. There's no reason not to assume that the novelist is speaking for himself when he has a cynical FBI agent sputter, long before Dallas, "The dangerous secrets used to be held outside the government. Plots, conspiracies, secrets of revolution, secrets of the social order. Now it's government that has a lock on the secrets that matter. All the danger is in the White House, from nuclear weapons on down." Far from persuading, such haymakers make us feel that DeLillo is only aggressively asserting – the whole damned country is rotten and corrupt, top to bottom, the murderer no worse than his victim – what he has failed to demonstrate.

DeLillo's latest novel, *Mao II*, published last spring, begins and ends with weddings: one, the mass marriage of sixty-five hundred Moonie couples in Yankee Stadium, the other a single couple in Beirut, just married, dancing through the rubble of civil war. The wedding celebration in Lebanon is glimpsed from her hotel balcony by Brita, a Swedish photographer who, in an earlier chapter, takes pictures of DeLillo's central figure, the novelist Bill Gray. Like J. D. Salinger, Gray has long been living in reclusive isolation, and hasn't published a word for over twenty

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years, laboring instead at endless revisions on his "new" novel. Now, as Brita is brought to his house, Gray has decided to step out of the self-imposed shadows and bare his face to her camera. Brita photographs only writers because she thinks they may soon vanish and because "the writer's face is the surface of the work. It's a clue to the mystery inside."

Sharing Bill Gray's country hideaway are Karen, one of the Moonie brides, who has left the Unification Church but still clings passively to some tatters of the Master's precepts, and Scott, the self-appointed acolyte who idolizes Gray's work and tries to bring some order into the novel's messy existence, which consists mainly of drinking too much and fidgeting over worthless revisions on the book he has come to loathe but cannot let go. It has become, for him, a kind of sickness, "a neutered near-human dragging through the house, hump-backed, hydrocephalic . . . dribbling brain fluid from his mouth." He soon gives up on his writing altogether and, at the urging of his editor, flies to London to try to secure the release of a Swiss poet held hostage by Maoist terrorists in Beirut. Because Bill takes off without leaving any word of his plans or whereabouts for Karen and Scott, Karen decides to look for him in New York. In a long and horribly graphic chapter, Karen wanders day after day through Tompkins Square Park, listlessly trying to do something for the homeless squatters in their cardboard shantytown. Meanwhile, in London, Bill Gray witnesses a terrorist bombing, has a futile meeting with a spokesman for the terrorists, and is severely injured in a street accident. On a ferry taking him from Cyprus to Beirut, he dies anonymously, his body stripped of identification by a thief.

One important theme of *Mao II* is to be found not in these events, conveyed as fragmentary vignettes whose place in the book as a whole never becomes completely clear, but in the conversation Bill Gray has with Brita while he is being photographed. Gravely demoralized and depressed, he has come to believe that novels have been drained of all meaning in the present-day world and that their function has been appropriated by terrorism:

> There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence . . . Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness.

And, returning to an idea DeLillo repeatedly aired in *Running Dog* and *White Noise*, Bill adds: "Because we're giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders and cameras . . . to bombs stashed in radios.

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News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative."

What DeLillo seems to be saying in these grim but rather confused reflections is that terrorism in the contemporary world has displaced literature, stolen its power. Novelists are no longer "shapers of sensibility and thought," and have thus ceased to be "dangerous" (a favorite word). Though one can assume that DeLillo had Salman Rushdie in mind – the free-thinking individual artist hunted down by a terrorist theocracy – as Bill Gray worked out the conflict between the novel and terrorism, the point is by no means clear. It is not Rushdie's novels that have been threatened by terrorism, but his very existence.

Neither is it easy to unriddle the parallel DeLillo seems to be drawing between a victimized artist like Rushdie and Bill Gray, though he links Gray to another major theme of the novel – that "the future belongs to crowds." In the light of this premise, the impotent Bill Gray is represented as yet another free and lonely voice raised against the smothering uniformity of the crowd – the defeated *one* against the obliterating *many*. But the characterization of Gray is too thin and epigrammatic to endow him with such significance. To demonstrate the murderous suffocation of the individual by crowds, DeLillo offers a series of scenes that Karen, entranced, watches on television with the sound turned off: the lethal crush of soccer fans at an English stadium, the hysterical mourners at the Ayatollah's funeral, and the protesters in Tiananmen Square loomed over by an enormous poster of Mao Zedong.

DeLillo's idea of crowds as instruments of terrorist devastation brings to mind, however, an earlier and very different conception of terrorism. In Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, published over eighty years ago, the destructive act of an individual is aimed not at arbitrarily random targets but at a symbolic institution. A Russian diplomat in London orders the secret agent Verloc to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in order to destroy science, time, and history in an act that will have "all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy." His idea is in fact not at all senseless, but it becomes so through a ghastly accident, when the half-witted boy carrying the bomb is blown up instead. Crowds, *pace* DeLillo, are neither always nor only the agents of death that he likes to imagine: the crowd of Chinese students in Beijing was not murderous; the students were demanding individual freedom. As Conrad knew, an individual in the grip of ideological fanaticism is capable of even greater damage than a crowd.

Yet it is the meaning of crowds that DeLillo is ostensibly exploring in *Mao II*, and the figure of Mao provides a vital point of DeLillo's enigmatic scheme, as well as the novel's title. In a pencil sketch by Andy

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Warhol for his painting "Mao II," DeLillo finds yet another kind of symbol for the degradation and death inflicted by crowds. Behind Warhol's repeated images of Mao, a multitude consisting of the same face over and over, DeLillo sees not only a deadening uniformity in the nature of the picture itself, but the consumerist commercialism that mistakes cynical kitsch for genuine art.

DeLillo has chosen to present these quite woolly ideas in spare and sketchy set-pieces, punctuated with aphorism, rather than through substantially dramatized experience. Most of what he appears to be saying we have to work out for ourselves, because he makes little effort to enact his gnomic aperçus through the lived experience of his characters. Of course aphorism has been a hallmark of DeLillo's fiction from the beginning. As someone in his first novel, *Americana*, remarks, "I have reached the point where the coining of aphorism seems a very worthy substitute for good company or madness," which is a pretty pompous aphorism in itself. But since aphorism cannot by definition serve as a ubstitute for character or incident, in *Mao II* this rhetorical device unintentionally becomes a *parody* of thought.

Parody, along with pastiche, is an important element of postmodernism, and that slippery term turns up often in discussions of DeLillo's work which link him to such similarly labeled novelists as Thomas Pynchon. But DeLillo's literary temperament is not at all like that reflected in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pynchon turns the world upside-down in a manic extravaganza of technological irreality and farce, but DeLillo is much too somber for such antic gamesmanship. His comic gestures always have a shivery edge. And for all that his novels are stuffed with kooks, killers, conspirators, he insists that his books are realistic portrayals of the way things are right now. As he told an interviewer, "I've always had a grounding in the real world, whatever esoteric flights I might indulge in from time to time." And, far from being in perfect tune with the time, as postmodernists like to see themselves, DeLillo fervently believes, as he remarked to a journalist years ago, "The writer is working against the age, and so he feels some satisfaction in not being widely read. He is diminished by an audience."

Though some of DeLillo's admirers have tried to find a consistent political position in his novels, they can't ignore his own insistence that "I don't have a political theory or doctrine that I'm espousing . . . I don't have a program." His novels are unquestionably arresting, written with powerful, scary eloquence, and drawn from an exceptionally well-stocked mind. Yet he most certainly does have fiercely critical opinions and attitudes about American society and culture that have unmistakable political implications, and they are the taproot of his work. Out of the

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paranoid style (to use Richard Hofstadter's phrase) grows DeLillo's relentless stand that this country is "totally engulfed by all the so-called worst elements of our national life and character." For him, government is an irremediably sinister network of conspiracy and corruption, intrigue and lies, secret codes and plots. As he put it in *Players* in 1977, and there's no reason to think he's changed his mind, America is honeycombed with "Mazes . . . intricate techniques. Our big problem in the past, as a nation, was that we didn't give our government credit for being the totally entangling force that it was. They were even more evil than we'd imagined." Though such pronouncements are usually uttered by weirdos and monsters, DeLillo plainly shares their black suspicions and anxious crotchets, their certainty that the real power in this country is controlled by "banks, insurance companies, credit organizations, tax examiners, passport offices, reporting services, police agents, intelligence gatherers." (He is a master at condemnatory lists.) And the whole sick scene invariably ends in violence and death, as though there is nothing more to the totality of American experience than this bleak and terrible actuality.

Is this really all we have, all we are? Though DeLillo's novels are unsettling, after a while we begin to feel that this enemy of excess is guilty of his own kind of overkill. The intractable connections he draws between consumerism and violence, kitsch and death, conspiracy and power are too unyielding to acquire the moral weight of truth, or to suggest, however cautiously, the possibility of redemption. Though he unquestionably belongs to the long line of American literary nay-sayers, though he is an extremely shrewd observer of present-day life and has perfected a powerfully evocative style, DeLillo's brutally apocalyptic view of American society finally seems reductive and self-satisfied. Paranoia, after all, is a *distortion* of reality. And though DeLillo's bizarre inventions can make our skin crawl, he is much less able to touch our minds and hearts.

PEARL K. BELL

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At the End of Our Good Day

RANDALL JARRELL: A LITERARY LIFE. By William Pritchard. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $14.95.

I first read Randall Jarrell's poems in the back of a Baltimore bookstore fourteen or fifteen years ago. His publisher had also released a collected volume of Elizabeth Bishop's: Both books were wildly out of alphabetical order, but shelved, weirdly enough, side by side. Some poetry reader who knew a great deal more than I did must have been browsing and then, distracted or in a hurry, left them that way.

I'd heard of Lowell, but not Jarrell or Bishop: Now that all three are dead, one name conjures up another with almost familial insistence. During their lifetimes the lion's share of notice went to Lowell, though his breakdowns, marital resolutions and irresolutions attracted as much attention as his work. If from time to time Jarrell and Bishop smashed their lives to pieces (in Jarrell's case, William Pritchard's biography gives little evidence of this), they lived away from the magnifying-glass scrutiny of literary gossip, Bishop's Brazil, Jarrell's Greensboro fantastically far from Lowell's Boston and New York. Bishop's drinking, Jarrell's breakdown and putative suicide at fifty – in a letter written when he was thirty-three, he describes himself as leading "an odd, independent, unsocial life remarkably unlike other peoples' lives, the life of someone whose principal work-and-amusement is writing and reading and thinking about things."

Lowell's "one life, one writing"; his "words meathooked from the living steer"; his late ungainsayable *ars poetica*, "Yet why not say what happened?" – all this depended on something having happened. In one of Jarrell's last poems, "The Player Piano," his perennial alter-ego, an older woman, says, "If only, somehow, I had learned to live!" And in a letter written after his breakdown and a month before his death: "I've always wanted to change, but not to change into what you become when you're mentally ill."

At some point, most poets' lives go dead on them – to paraphrase Lowell, they reflect, moralize, imagine: Some single faculty keeps on moving and fanning the air, but the whole-man has stopped. Of course Lowell's illness kept him from the "immunity to soil, entanglements and rebellion" which he praised, envied and quietly censured in Jarrell: Wasn't his old friend a little above it all? Bishop's unhappiness, valor, and humor – how often her critics have commented on the sheen of her poems' scoured surfaces! And yet something heartbroken stares back from her stoical, self-contained gaze, a terror like Jarrell's snow-leopard, "the

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heart of heartlessness." But Jarrell's beautifully flashing, amazingly flexible armor of European culture so useful to his criticism, his Freud, the Brothers Grimm, Proust, Chekhov, Rilke – did he live perhaps a little vicariously? Did he feel this in his forties, until at fifty, something in him rebelled?

When Jarrell thinks discursively in his poems (dramatic monologues generally in women's voices like "Next Day" or "The Woman at the Washington Zoo"), he feels and talks like a woman who feels and talks like Jarrell. When he acts (his Rilke translations, war poems, and fairy-tale fables), he is a child with an adult's intelligence searching for Mother and Father. In all his poems – and surely in his last best book, *The Lost World* – his sexual identity is strangely indeterminate, an intellectualized, tormented, half-joking androgeny.

In his dramatic monologues Jarrell's female speakers are thinly disguised versions of himself: What woman – or man but Randall Jarrell – quotes, while shopping in the supermarket, William James: "Wisdom," said William James,// "Is learning what to overlook." But this woman-as-Jarrell also haunts his criticism. His provocative essay on Frost's "Home Burial," in which an estranged husband and wife try to mend the breach caused by the death of their newborn child, is strangely severe on the husband. In taking the woman's part in this poem, Jarrell tends to see the man as slow, dull-witted, even physically and sexually brutal.

Frost isn't nearly so efficient in placing blame: Even if the man is what Jarrell paints him, the reader still feels as much pity as scorn. Jarrell's sense of his own superiority as a critic chills his feeling for the husband's inarticulate, hurt, woefully desperate attempt to make contact with his wife:

> My words are nearly always an offense.
> I don't know how to speak of anything
> So as to please you. But I might be taught,
> I should suppose. I can't say I see how.
> A man must partly give up being a man
> With women-folk. We could have some arrangement
> By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off
> Anything special you're a mind to name.
> Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.
> Two that don't love can't live together without them.
> But two that do can't live together with them.

Jarrell is right to condemn the man's sensitivity as "a willing hopeful form of insensitivity," but his ear misses the pitying, awkward grandeur of the man's speech. In describing the husband's proverb about those who do and do not love as a "partially truthful but elephantine aphorism that

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lumbers through a queerly stressed line a foot too long," he scores a point, but misses the sad, terrible heart of Frost's poem.

And yet he gains far more than he loses by using "Home Burial" as a template for his own internal contradictions. His essay has the power and conviction of spiritual autobiography, his breathlessness tracking the woman's psychological fluctuations in a mixture of Freud, stylistic analysis, and such imaginative empathy that Jarrell and the woman almost merge. The man is of the world, all body and will. The woman is a force of the imagination doomed to inhabit the world of body and will. There is no reconciling these two: Frost's poem also says this, but not in the sorrowing, partial way Jarrell sees it. Frost is harder, more matter-of-fact, inclined even to shrug a little at this man and woman. While Frost made it a point to discriminate between art and life, for Jarrell the two knit seamlessly together, revealing just how literary a sensibility he possessed.

That Jarrell could live so deeply in books made him a superb critic – did it help or harm him as a poet? The physical world, the world of bodies that criticism glances at but never seems to see . . . even as a poet, this was not his subject! And yet his empathy for Whitman, Williams, Frost, Lowell – didn't his enthusiasm betray a longing for an entrance into the violent, reckless, exuberantly physical realm his criticism made for each of them? In prose he loved Kipling, Tolstoy, Chekhov, the Turgenev of the hunting sketches. And though his powers of description did justice to the physical world, description was not, as it was for these others, revelation. Revelation was dialectics, his endless recourse to "And yet . . . "

The war poems – are less dialectical than anything he ever wrote, as close as he comes to entering a purely physical world. Here time does not balloon into the once-upon-a-time timelessness of the fairy-tale fables or the lyrical eternal present of his Rilke translations. Time in Jarrell's war is a moment just before death in a fighter, a bomber, a parachute; or the moment when the sleeping soldier dreams his escape from the barracks and is back home, a child among women who take care of him; or the moment when a guard starts to sing "Sam Hall" and the prisoners he's guarding stop picking up trash and grin. Single dramatic moments which blossom into consciousness as testaments to "scenes of war," but also root down into the unconscious as ogre-soldier children playing the adult game of war: "In bombers we named for girls, we burned/ The cities we had learned about in school – ".

The hurt of the war is real to Jarrell, but perhaps embodies another, more personal hurt. In a letter quoted in Pritchard's biography, Jarrell speaks of his parents' divorce: "I've lived all over, and always been separated from at least half of a very small family, and been alone as children

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ever are." A lost child's search for Mother or Father – the clear, homely simplicity of Jarrell's loneliness lies at the heart of the war poems. His search for origins figures as a source of hidden power for some of his most objective, most intensely personal writing.

This loneliness haunts the lost bomber-pilot children who search for the Mother-Carrier strafed and torpedoed into flames. They find instead the ghostly Father incarnated in the weapons themselves. (Jarrell's equation in "Home Burial" of male sexuality with will, and of will with the murderous force that shapes soldiers, underlies this connection.) The tracers wriggle like sperm and the fighters appear "like the apparition, death," in the great glass dome of the bomber's gun turret. Jarrell displaces death onto machines; or he sees it as the unconsciousness of sleep; or as an abstraction synonymous with the authority of the State. Death never comes to Jarrell's oldiers with the brute, bitter finality displayed in Wilfred Owen's poem, "Asleep":

> Sleep took him by the brow and laid him back.
> And in the happy no-time of his sleeping
> Death took him by the heart. There was a quaking
> Of the aborted life within him leaping . . .
> Then chest and sleepy arms once more fell slack.

In Jarrell, there is nothing so physically – or sexually – graphic; he reserves that for the deaths of the planes themselves: Male orgasm as destruction underlies this imagery: "The red wriggling tracers/ . . . hunt out the one end they have being for,/ Are metamorphosed into one pure smear/ Of flame, and die/ In the maniacal convulsive spin/ Of the raider with a wing snapped off, the plane/ Trailing its flaming kite's tail to the wave." As befits a mechanized war, the dead pilot inside vanishes into the details of the plane's destruction.

Even when Jarrell envisions the death of a pilot, instead of really dying with quaking and convulsions like Owen's sleeping soldier, the pilot has a moment of recognition – and then *doesn't* die: " . . . the pilot,/ Drugged in a blanket . . . / Knows, knows at last; he yawns the chattering yawn/ Of effort and anguish, of hurt hating helplessness – / Yawns sobbingly, his head falls back, he sleeps." Jarrell's sobbing pilot could be a child crying himself to sleep: Having suffered the global tantrum of the war, he realizes the full anguish of his own helplessness. And while he comes face to face with oblivion, his war seems another order of experience from the war of Owen's soldier, the "aborted life within him leaping": At least the pilot's war includes moments, terrible though they may be, of self-recognition. In Owen's war, his soldiers – with the cruelest, most irremediable irony – often simply die.

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In *The Lost World*, Jarrell's search for origins finds an ending both happy and unhappy: His grandparents, the Mama and Pop of his childhood poems. But his adult journey backward to childhood is counterbalanced by the book's other concern: Woman.

But a Jarrell Woman, not the highly individuated women in Lowell's or Bishop's work. In Jarrell, women often serve as opportunities for charming, self-ironic commentary on men's unreal expectations of them: That they verge on stereotype can make his wit seem labored. At times one wonders how a man who taught most of his life in a women's college, married twice, his second marriage making him the stepfather of two daughters, could be, in these poems, so blasé and predictable. And yet Jarrell's use of a female persona is almost always interesting: Why this access to feeling denied him in his own voice?

In part, when Jarrell writes about women in his own persona, the supercilious tones of the critic keep intruding – he becomes chatty and loses the immediacy and power of direct presentation. But more to the point is the source of Jarrell's defensiveness: In his essay on "Home Burial," Jarrell conflates the husband's sexuality with the spade that he used to dig his own child's grave. For a Freudian like Jarrell, the connection must seem obvious. But Jarrell's animus, ostensibly from the wife's point of view, about her husband's "tool," makes one wonder: "Her next words, 'and still your spade kept lifting,' gives the man's tool a dead, mechanical life of its own; it keeps on and on, crudely, remorselessly, neither guided nor halted by spirit." And yet the grave needs to be dug. Shouldn't it be enough to do the shoveling of your own child's grave without worrying if the spade is guided or halted by spirit? The man can't afford to pay someone else. For a progressive liberal like Jarrell, he takes an awfully dim view of this hard-pressed farmer's sweat and labor.

Perhaps Jarrell's superior rambling, his torturous, half-joking elaborations of male and female stereotypes, masked his anxiety about his own sexual nature. In these lines from "Woman," his edginess about the physical nature of sexual love makes his wit seem a little forced, even prudish: "When, like Disraeli, I murmur/ That you are more like a mistress than a wife,/ More like an angel than a mistress; when, like Satan, I hiss in your ear some vile suggestion,/ Some delectable abomination,/ You smile at me indulgently: 'Men, men!' " This exchange between husband and wife makes sexual desire seem like a game of talking dirty – though in this case the dirty talker is an extremely literary one who says "vile" and "delectable" instead of something more direct. (This is Lowell: "We stand to leave,/ your breasts touch my chest;/ under our clothes, our bodies/ are but as bodies are.") And instead of hissing back, the wife – at once playmate, mistress, mother – only murmurs indulgently

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to this stagy Disraeli-Satan, recognizing the childish element of make-believe in the whole set-up.

But Jarrell isn't always so evasive. "The Bronze David of Donatello" powerfully explores the homo-erotic side of Jarrell's essentially undifferentiated sexual nature. In this poem Jarrell sees the statue as a metaphor of sexual foreplay and conquest. Jarrell identifies himself with both lover and beloved, with the sexually ambiguous, weirdly virginal, weirdly whorish boy David (whose "ribcase, navel, nipples are the features/ Of a face that hold us like the whore Medusa's – / Of a face that, like the genitals, is sexless"); and with the adult-ogre's severed head on which the boy's foot rests. Goliath, who "snores a little in satisfaction," seems as much the boy's lover as his foe, his helmet's wing "like a swan's wing up inside the leg," reaching "almost, to the rounded/ Small childish buttocks." If victory is sexual victory, Goliath is as much a conqueror as David.

But such frankness is rare in his poems about women (as opposed to when he speaks in a woman's voice). In the best light, perhaps Jarrell used stereotypes intending to explode them. As it is, they do too much work, emotional and aesthetic, in these poems – and preserve him from delving into the ambiguities of "our bodies/ are but as bodies are."

In Jarrell's dramatic monologues, his irony falls away, he becomes grave, direct, open. In "Next Day," one of his finest poems, his female persona talks about her own sexual desires as a middle-aged wife and mother: "Now that I'm old, my wish/ Is womanish:/ That the boy putting groceries in my car/ See me. It bewilders me he doesn't see me." No jokiness or smirking in this avowal. And even when Jarrell resorts to his old standby "vile" to describe sexual fantasy ("And holding their flesh within my flesh, their vile/ Imagining within my imagining,/ I too have taken/ The chance of life"), the irony is plangent, sadly in keeping with this Everywoman. Having attended the funeral of her friend the day before, she realizes that aging and death are as terrifyingly specific as her "friend's cold made-up face, granite among its flowers . . . "

In "Next Day" the body, in consonance with Jarrell's own ambiguous sexual nature, is a prison-house of shifting, almost meaningless identities: "No one has anything, I'm anybody./ I stand beside my grave,/ Confused with my life, that is commonplace and solitary." The only escape from this bleak conclusion is in a mythic world before time and identity. In "The House in the Wood," one of Jarrell's best fairy-tale fables, " . . . what was before the world/ And will be after, holds me to its black/ Breasts and rocks me: the oven is cold, the cage is empty,/ . . . the witch and her child sleep." Jarrell conjures this limbo in the unsettling terms of Hansel and Gretel: What will the witch-mother do to the child if ever she should wake?

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In another, though no less troubled escape, Jarrell sets against the world of time his own mythical childhood. In "The Lost World" he never directly mentions his real mother and father, the sexual, time-bound beings that produced him. His own persona as a boy, his idealized grandparents, Mama and Pop (already too old to be sexual, at least in the poem), float in the ether of his precarious Eden: That Jarrell wrote "The Lost World" in his last troubled years explains in part his desire for an imaginative haven. But his impulse to examine the forces – sexuality and death – that make the child father to the man keeps disrupting his idyll. The poem's achievement lies in how skillfully Jarrell plays his grown-up persona off his child persona to recreate the aura of his own lost innocence.

In some of the most memorable writing of his career, he describes Mama, "who looks with righteous love/ At all of us, her spare face half a girl's," as she enters a chicken coop and, by wringing a chicken's neck, unwittingly initiates her grandson into the world of time. As the chicken lunges and reels in circles, the boy watches Mama standing "like a nun/ In the center of each awful anguished ring." The disparity between Mama and her action is too much for the boy to fathom – he leaves this to the grown-up Jarrell, who sees Mama "standing like Judith, with the hen's head in her hand." Judith – the seductress and murderess of Holofernes.

By now the polarity between nun and Judith should be familiar, already figured in Woman as playmate, wife, mother, mistress. But what keeps Mama from becoming a straw woman is the objective manner in which Jarrell records her actions ("She enters a chicken coop . . . / She chooses one,/ Comes out, and wrings its neck"); and the care Jarrell takes to keep his grown-up self from intruding on the boy's terrified reactions:

> The thudding and scrambling go on, go on – then they fade,
> I open my eyes, it's over . . . Could such a thing
> Happen to anyone? It could to a rabbit, I'm afraid;
> It could to –
> "Mama, you won't kill Reddy ever,
> You won't ever, will you?" The farm woman tries to persuade
> The little boy, her grandson, that she'd never
> Kill the boy's rabbit, never even think of it.
> He would like to believe her . . . And whenever
> I see her, there in that dark infinite,
> Standing like Judith, with the hen's head in her hand,
> I explain it away, in vain – a hypocrite,
> Like all who love.

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With great fluidity and compression Jarrell registers the stages of the boy's mounting panic; then he shifts into third person in which he presents with skillful understatement both the boy's and Mama's conflicting viewpoints; and then he finishes the passage in his own adult voice by ruefully acknowledging that love is innocent only if we can explain away the contradictions in those we love.

These superbly handled dramatic modulations carry through to the poem's conclusion several lines later, in which Jarrell manages to regain some equanimity through the figure of Pop. Pop as surrogate father, even the All-Father, foils the mad scientist in the boy's magazine. He reassures the child that the mad scientist couldn't really destroy the world: " 'No, that's just play,/ Just make-believe,' he says. The sky is gray./ We sit there, at the end of our good day." Of course Jarrell's use of "there" instead of "here" shows just how far the grown-up poet is from the boy. And the historical irony of the mad scientist's make-believe isn't lost on Jarrell, who mentions Armageddon in other poems.

Pop's failure to protect the child from the male provenance of war, Mama's unwitting collusion in introducing the child to death and the hypocrisies of love – these ironies hedge considerably the optimism of the poem's last line. But if the sky is gray for the grown-up poet, his skill in weighting the couplet in favor of "our good day" forges not only an emblem of reconciled opposites, but expresses his adult solicitude for his own child-self: The grown-up Jarrell knows just how provisional is any reconciliation with the past. He decently keeps to himself his own adult doubts in the interest of the child's momentary happiness.

In imagining what Jarrell will mean to the future, I think back to my own experience in that Baltimore bookstore. He seemed nearer to me than either Bishop or Lowell, whose technique and presence in their poems seemed unapproachably accomplished. Jarrell was baggier, his prosody a little haphazard, his childhood, just as mine was, still close about him. Pop the welder and my own father, who first worked for the railroad, then ran a drive-in theater, were far more likely to have met than my father and Commander Lowell; or my grandparents and Bishop's grandparents, who seemed otherworldly rustic, almost fairy-tale people. But it wasn't only class that made me at home in Jarrell's work. His Great Books sensibility was inviting to a novice because of its idealism: Jarrell believed in greatness and made one aware of the gravity of calling oneself a poet.

Each generation finds a mirror in another: The kind of poem that Jarrell, that Bishop and Lowell wrote, seemed to me then an untapped resource. The generation of Beats and Deep Image poets, some of them taught by Lowell and Berryman, broke from their teachers with radical

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finality, their poetry, when I was a student, "the new" I wrestled with – but only half-heartedly: It was Jarrell, Lowell, and Bishop who really sustained my interest, who kept alive for my generation a New Critical bias in reading and writing. But of course my choices were sloppier than I've made them out; galaxies of poets spun in my head without my being quite certain of the how and why. Jarrell stood apart – no poet so accomplished seemed at the same time so helpless or so accepting of his own helplessness. His belief in poetry as the work of a daemon fueled my raw belief in my own inner voices. Young poets will always favor Jarrell for his generous and painful conviction that the imagination is continually in a state of becoming, that nothing in poetry or in life is ever finished or perfectible.

I've mentioned in passing William Pritchard's even-handed, intelligent biography. Like David Kalstone on Elizabeth Bishop, Pritchard focuses on how the life and the poems intertwine. As a critic he answers the well-known charges that Jarrell is sentimental and diffuse by appealing to his own experience of reading Jarrell's poems. Like Jarrell, he is a loving reader of poetry, an enthusiast, honest in his appraisals. He writes in a lucid, informal style, his special gift as a critic to

Although the critic takes precedence over the biographer, Pritchard's psychological speculations are fair-minded, quietly skeptical of Jarrell's and his friends' version of the poet's life. As biography, the most interesting part of Pritchard's book chronicles Jarrell's life in the Army. This probably reflects the interesting problem of writing about someone whose principal work-and-amusement was "writing and reading and thinking about things." That Pritchard's understanding of the poet accords with the man one pictures after reading his poetry, his novel, his criticism and letters makes Jarrell and Pritchard a lucky pair.

TOM SLEIGH

Myth and Mortal

DIALOGUES WITH LEUCÒ. By Cesare Pavese. Translated by William Arrowsmith and D. S. Carne-Ross. Eridanos Press. $19.95.

In his superb essay on Cesare Pavese, "The Silence of Origins," W. S. Di Piero reports that the author had a special fondness for his book of mythic dialogues – indeed, that on the day before he was to take his life he sent a special delivery letter to his friend and biographer, David La-

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jolo, in which he wrote: "If you want to know who I am now, re-read 'La Belva' in *Dialogues With Leucò*."

The reader who would attempt to make sense of the man and his suicide will naturally hasten to the piece in question (translated in this edition as "The Lady of the Beasts"), as I did. Alas, it is a frustrating point of entry, offering no clear answers, only enigmas. Pavese was simply not the kind of writer to hand his deepest insights to anyone who came knocking.

But maybe such an approach has its uses. For a reading of "The Lady of the Beasts" will almost inevitably send the reader back to the beginning of the book, for context – just as, again almost inevitably, a reading of the whole dictates that one turn back to the first page and start again, for comprehension. *Dialogues With Leucò*, even in the translucent idiom of William Arrowsmith and Donald Carne-Ross, is a Gordian knot of a book, except that no stroke of the sword will solve it; one must work, slowly and patiently, drawing continually on what one knows of life. Only then comes a loosening of the cord, some understanding of the mysteries as mysteries, some grasp of the complexity of Pavese's vision.

The work comprises twenty-seven dialogues, each representing an encounter between figures – often obscure figures – from Greek mythology. At first glance the dialogues seem unrelated; they make no extended tale. But a closer inspection – a reading that attends and pauses long enough for the resonance to gather – reveals a thematic development of great suggestiveness. Di Piero goes so far as to insist that the book be read as a poem. Then, if we consider "each of the twenty-seven dialogues a stanza or strophe, *Dialogues With Leucò* emerges as an epic history of consciousness, the insinuation of death and blood-fear into the Western psyche, stretching from the Age of Cronos to the present."

A large claim, that, but not too large. The extraordinary compression of the material, the subtle braiding of the principal themes, the progression that declares a deepening authority – these are all properties of the epical poetic endeavor. Moreover, the language, while not shaped to the line, nevertheless strives toward the condition of charged and uncluttered utterance that we so prize in the archaic bards.

The dialogues are difficult to read or discuss without psychologizing, at least at first. Read in sequence, they appear to tell of the repression over time of the primal drives and to point to their reemergence, or sublimation, in our societal institutions and arts. But such a description plucks the fangs from a fierce, original, and decidedly non-programmatic work. It also misleads. For Pavese's aim is somehow anterior to such interpretations. That is, the dialogues are there in and for themselves; they take the form they do because interpretive discourse cannot reach the

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charged materials that Pavese would assay; they ask us to read past reason, for they concern, at one level, the late emergence of reason from the autonomous play of chthonic forces.

Pavese's procedure is to give a short situating preface and then to plunge *in medias res*, trusting that the reader will pick up the necessary context. We are not required to be versed in the mythological particulars, though every reading further confirms that Pavese's own imagining is deeply referential – a good handbook of mythic lore will open unsuspected vistas.

"The Chimera," the second of the dialogues, can be taken as representative. Pavese's preface notes:

> It was with high hearts that the youth of Greece set out for the East in quest of glory and death. Here their courage and daring took them through a sea of fabulous atrocities, in which some of them failed to keep their heads. There is no point in citing names. Besides, there were more than seven such Crusades. It is Homer himself who – in Book VI of the *Iliad* – tells us of the melancholy which consumed the killer of the Chimera in his old age, and of his young grandson Sarpedon who died under the walls of Troy.

The speakers in the dialogue are Sarpedon and Hippolochus. Hippolochus is the son of Bellerophon; Sarpedon, who was slain by Patroclus at Troy, is sometimes represented as the son of Zeus and Laodamia, the daughter of Bellerophon. The exchange, then, is between a son and a grandson. As for Bellerophon, it may be remembered that after his successes in slaying the Chimera and pacifying the Amazons, he deemed himself a god and tried to mount up to heaven. Zeus, outraged at his presumption, caused him to fall to earth, blinded. Thereupon, Bellerophon avoided all contact with mortals and passed his days wandering aimlessly in the Aleian fields.

Sarpedon begins by reporting to Hippolochus that he has seen Bellerophon, that he is "a terrible sight." Bellerophon has said to him, "If I were your age, boy, I'd go drown myself . . . If you want to stay just and merciful, stop living." Hippolochus is shocked, unable to believe that his heroic father has succumbed to bitterness. Sarpedon tells of the old man's belief – that he has been deserted by the gods, that he must now make atonement for the slaying of the Chimera. He had spoken to Sarpedon as follows:

> From the day I stained myself with the monster's blood, I haven't had a real life. I have looked for men to fight, tamed the Amazons,

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> slaughtered the Solymi. I ruled over Lycia and I planted a great garden – but all this was nothing. Where can I find another Chimera? Where is the strength of the arms that killed her . . . How can the man who met the Chimera resign himself to death?

Hippolochus can neither grieve for Bellerophon's plight nor for the bloody past that is no more. It falls to Sarpedon to search out the meanings in the old legends. When Hippolochus says to him, "There's no point in thinking of those things," it is clear that he is refusing the truth of origins. Sarpedon can only reply:

> The spring remains, the mountain, the terror. The dreams remain. Bellerophon can't take a step without stumbling on a corpse, an old rancor, a pool of blood, surviving from those days when it all happened, and things weren't dreams. In those days his right arm had a weight in the world, and he killed.

The dialogue is, on one level, a lament for the passing away of ruder, bloodier, more real times. On another level, it proposes the survival of the archaic through the internalizations of memory and dream. Throughout the *Dialogues* we find this duality – not ambivalence – of presentation. The projection of the mythic figures gives dramatic animation to concerns that we accept, with habituated passivity, as mere ciphers in a psychic code. Pavese commands both perspectives, but his clear ambition is to track our chimeras back to their bloody places of origin. To this end, he does not enclose the mythic in quotation marks – he treats it directly, as another species of history. We can invoke the psychoanalytic paradigm, but we cannot deploy it with easy assurance.

There is simply not the space here to track the woof and warp of the unfolding dialogues. I can affirm only that the reader is drawn slowly forward, made to plumb the root passions and drives. The mythic frame gradually shifts; the ancestral becomes the timeless. It is a commonplace, I realize, to say that the myths live on, but sometimes the commonplace must serve.

In Pavese's dialogue, "The Mother," he has Hermes speak as follows to Meleager:

> Your lives are forever contained in the burning brand, and your mother draws you from the fire, and you live half blazing. The passion of which you die is your mother's passion, smoldering on in you. What are you but her flesh and blood?

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The truth, or message, is here given in the context of the mythic, but what we realize in the encounter is that myth itself is but the original metaphor, the first and possibly still the most charged dramatization of the patterns that were seen to underlie experience. All artistic expression, it stands to reason, must consciously or unconsciously echo the mythic. Pavese recognized this and elected to take the most direct path. He returned to the source, not so much to reinterpret as reinhabit. What he shows is that these original legends are less a set of codified – and completed – narratives than they are an archive of live recognitions and patterns. He is not intent upon modifying or adding but upon reading more deeply into what has been given.

What is destiny – for gods, for men? Is experience arbitrary, or is it governed by some undisclosed purpose, some *telos*? Do events happen because they happen, or because they must? Pavese was clearly bedeviled by the primary existential questions, and the dialogues take them up over and over, moving from the godly perspective to that of the mortals.

The gods, of course, inhabit a realm beyond all contingency; for them all is known, foreseen. And this is at once the apotheosis of freedom – they are deathless and dread-free – and an almost intolerable burden. For to know all, and to be exempt from mortality, is in a sense to be enslaved. And this, interestingly, is seen as the reason why the gods were so bent upon intruding into the domain of the human. Here, in "Mankind," Bia tells Kratos:

> Brother dear, will you try to understand that even though the world is no longer divine, for this reason the gods who come down from the Mountain find it always new and always rewarding. To hear the speech of men – what a marvelous experience that can be! They know they suffer, they struggle, they possess the earth . . . Men are poor worms, but with them everything is unforeseen, everything is a discovery. You can understand an animal and even a god, but no one, not even we immortals, knows what is going on in the hearts of men. Only if you live with them and for them can you enjoy the savor of the world.

But if it is given to the gods to be deathless, it is not likewise given that they should remain omnipotent. The *Dialogues* are, as I've suggested, very much about the dying of their power, their withdrawal from the human sphere. As Prometheus tells Heracles in "The Mountain":

> Death entered this world with the gods. You mortals fear death because you know that the gods, being gods, are immortal. But

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> everyone has the death he deserves. Their day will come too . . . Not everything can be explained. But always remember that monsters do not die. What dies is the fear they inspire. So with the gods: when men no longer fear them, they will vanish.

Their vanishing, one might theorize, happened by way of a transubstantiation. They became their legends, their myths, and as these, too, lose potency – as they are forgotten – their fabled might all but disappears. They again become what they were at first: the paradigmatic forms of our experience, our longings, our imaginings.

The last dialogue, "The Muses," gathers such intimations and gives them form. We read the piece as an account of the passing of the torch from gods to men, but it is also Pavese's summary articulation of the place of the mythic. The exchange is between Mnemoseyne (also called Melete) and Hesiod, first of the line of poets:

> MNEMOSEYNE: . . . Don't you understand that man, every man, is born in that swamp of blood? That the sacred and divine are with you too? In the bed, in the fields before the fire? In everything you do, you renew a divine model. Day and night, there is not an instant, not even the most futile, which has not sprung from the silence of your origins.
> HESIOD: You speak, Melete, and I cannot help believing. Only let me adore you.
> MNEMOSEYNE: You have another alternative.
> HESIOD: What is that?
> MNEMOSEYNE: Try telling mortals the things you know.

This is the task, the high responsibility, that Pavese took upon himself. His *Dialogues With Leucò*, grave and mysterious, will never be a popular work. But it is – and I would say this of very few other books of our time – a repository of human wisdom and the anguish that earns it.

SVEN BIRKERTS

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Bruno Schulz Redux

THE DRAWINGS OF BRUNO SCHULZ. Edited by Jerzy Ficowski. Northwestern University Press. $59.95.
THE COMPLETE FICTION OF BRUNO SCHULZ. Edited by Jerzy Ficowski. Walker and Co. $22.95.
LETTERS AND DRAWINGS OF BRUNO SCHULZ: WITH SELECTED PROSE. Translated from the Polish by Celina Wieniewska. Afterword by Jerzy Ficowski. Harper and Row. $25.00.

Bruno Schulz, the morbidly shy, reclusive, hypersensitive Polish-Jewish writer, would surely be stunned to find he had, in his centenary, become as mythical a literary presence as the exotic entourage he so ingeniously invented in his own drawings and short stories. This unlikely object of nearly cultish adulation would most likely find this fame as puzzling as his admirers have found him. The recent flurry of books by Schulz that have appeared in the space of two years – the volume of drawings, his letters, and his collected fiction – shock, confound, overwhelm, and astonish with their abundance of sensory data, voluptuous prose, and hallucinatory splendor. Yet, despite this impressive triptych, the man behind these images seems as much a mystery as ever, an enigma whose essence is better translated into fiction than biography, as his surfacing in several contemporary novels attests. Cynthia Ozick's bewitching novel, *The Messiah of Stockholm*, is a deeply felt and brilliantly imagined homage to Schulz and to his lost novel, *The Messiah*, rescued and reimagined here if only for a moment of fictional time. A. B. Yehoshua uses part of a Schulz story as an epigraph in *A Late Divorce*, and David Grossman devotes some hundred pages to "Bruno" in *See Under: Love*. Grossman's fictive stand-in describes being bowled over by Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* (which appeared in Polish as *Cinnamon Shops*):

> Suddenly, ten pages into the book, I forgot everything and read in breathless excitement. It was the first time I ever began to reread a book as soon as I finished it, and I've read it a good many times since. For months it was the only book I needed. . . . And I did something I haven't done since I was a child: I transcribed entire paragraphs into my notebook. To help me remember.

Singled out for murder by an SS agent on "Black Thursday," November 19, 1942, Schulz was buried by a friend late that evening in the Jewish cemetery in his small town of Drohobycz (then part of

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Poland, earlier part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, now part of the Soviet Union). In *See Under: Love*, Grossman imagines the Schulz of *The Street of Crocodiles* eluding his killers by jumping into the sea at Danzig and turning into a salmon. In reality, both his grave and the graveyard, like the manuscript of his lost novel, *The Messiah*, have disappeared, perhaps fittingly for an artist whose life, death, drawings, and stories have themselves become the mythical threads out of which other writers' stories have since been woven. How ironic that the writer who lived all his life in a small provincial town, who kept at a distance even those he loved, allowing them access only through the gateway of letter-writing, has so touched his readers that many cannot bear the thought of his death and, in protest, have rewritten and reimagined his fate, launching what he would have called "a counter-offensive of fantasy" against reality itself.

Schulz owes his posthumous reputation not only to the tireless Jerzy Ficowski, who for forty years has conducted a treasure hunt for Schulz's lost writings and drawings, but also to Philip Roth, who, as general editor of Penguin's *Writers of the Other Europe Series,* introduced Schulz to American readers (In dedicating *The Messiah of Stockholm* to Roth, Cynthia Ozick thanked him for introducing her to Schulz.) Ficowski has claimed that Schulz's work "was so distinctive that it had no precedents in Polish and European literature nor any worthy followers or successors." Yet Schulz certainly knew German literature: he loved Thomas Mann (his letters to Mann are lost), wrote a brilliant afterword to *The Trial*, and adored Rilke. He certainly knew and reviewed with great insight modern Polish literature. Danilo Kis, the recipient just before his death of the Bruno Schulz Prize, given to a writer underrecognized in the United States, does seem a successor of sorts. Kis, whose fiction is as father-fixated as Schulz's, once quipped to John Updike, "Schulz is my god." Even Kis's choice of title for his novel *Hourglass* is reminiscent of Schulz's second novel, *Sanatorium at the Sign of the Hourglass.*

Yet if there are no "worthy successors" to Schulz, there are at least a flock of literary love-children. Cynthia Ozick's Lars Andemening, the Swedish book-reviewer in *The Messiah of Stockholm* is convinced that he is Schulz's son. He speaks adamantly of his peculiar lineage:

> "I've got every detail of his face, I know it by heart. I know almost every word he wrote. Father and son . . . When I wake up, I can see my father's eye. It seems to be my eye, but it's his. And he lets me have his own eye to look through."

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Lars, presented with the recovered original copy of Schulz's *Messiah*, "felt his own ordinary pupil consumed by a conflagration in the socket. As if copulating with an angel whose wings were on fire."

David Grossman's hero, a Hebrew writer similarly obsessed with Schulz, observes:

> Whenever I finished copying some passage, my pen would jiggle and litter the page with a line or two of my own – though how shall I put it – in Bruno's voice, by straining to hear him, having clearly perceived his desperate need to express himself, now that he was deprived of his writing hand . . . I was merely the vessel, the writing hand . . . through which his stifled energy could flow.

Schulz managed to do the writing and drawing that has spurred this adulation in his spare time, that is, when he was free from the drudgery of teaching drawing twenty-seven hours a week to young boys at a Drohobycz gymnasium. From a very young age, he covered every available scrap of paper with his sketches., mystified in later years at how

> we manage to acquire certain images in childhood that carry decisive meanings for us. They function like those threads in the solution around which the significance of the world crystallizes for us. These are the texts that are marked out, made ready for us somehow, lying in wait for us at the very entrance of life.

Schulz did not have his first book of stories, *Cinammon Shops*, published until he was forty. The stories began life as a series of postscripts dropped off into a mailbox, part of a correspondence now lost, with a Polish-Jewish writer, Debora Vogel. Eventually the postscripts broke free of their epistolary moorings and were discovered by another influential Polish woman, Zofia Nalkowska, who became Schulz's patroness and persuaded the publishing house of Rój to publish this unknown writer from the provinces. By contrast, from an early age he impressed teachers, friends, and galleries with his artwork.

Schulz began to illustrate his stories some ten years before his literary debut. He designed the dust jackets for *Cinnamon Shops* (1934) and *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass* (1937), and he created drawings for each book, although only the thirty-three for *Sanatorium* were used. Jerzy Ficowski believes that Schulz himself wrote the copy on the original dust jacket of *Sanatorium*:

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> The author illustrates his work himself. This very striving to finish the task with his own hands makes us think about the inspiration of priests and craftsmen of the Middle Ages.

During the Nazi occupation of Drohobycz, Schulz was hired as a "house Jew" by the Gestapo officer Felix Landau, to paint signs and family portraits and perform light carpentry. Although Schulz was given false documents to help him escape, he never got the chance to use these "Aryan papers." Walking in the ghetto on the way to buy food, he was shot twice in the head by Landau's rival, Karl Guenther. Schulz was kept alive for a year serving Landau, who boasted he had a Jewish artist-slave that he sustained with a slice of bread and a bowl of soup. One of Schulz's tasks at Landau's was to decorate Landau's son's room with fairy tales, later described by one of Schulz's former students (quoted in the *Drawings*):

> Even then Schulz remained faithful to his artistic method: the figures of kings, knights, and squires painted in a fantastic, legendary scenery in the house of the Gestapo officer displayed distinctively non-Aryan features. Those were the people Schulz were living with at the time. Their emaciated, tormented faces were rendered with unbelievable resemblance. And those miserable people, transferred by Schulz's imagination from the world of tragic reality, reappeared in his paintings with splendor and glory as kings seated in their thrones in sable furs and crowns, as knights on white horses surrounded by their squires, as sovereign rulers riding in their golden carriages . . .

In much the same way that Schulz's letters expose his fragile emotional make-up and his frequent descents into near-malfunctioning, his drawings, so many of which are self-portraits, reveal even more striking obsessions and neuroses; one feels a discomfort watching this artist go public under the misguided assumption that he is portraying nothing terribly offensive or grotesque. While looking at the volume of his artwork can induce queasiness or even embarrassment, one cannot easily put it down. Utterly spellbinding, it offers a glimpse into a tormented soul fixated on degradation, whose prose only alludes to tendencies which spring into full bloom under the art pen. As a reviewer of his own writing, Schulz's self-perception dazzles us; he sent this description to the Italian publisher of a translation of *Cinnamon Shops*:

> The keynote to *Sanatorium* is the dream of renewal of life through the power of delight, the unleashing of inspiration, the primeval human belief that the dammed-up loveliness of things, hampered and

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> hidden though it is, only awaits an inspired being to break its bonds and release a flood of happiness over all the world . . . Those reveries about shuffling off the coils of the body, about a revaluation of life through poetry, have found in Schulz a new homeland, a climate of their own, in which, watchful, they burgeon forth in tropical vegetation: a legendary childhood of wonder, elation, and metamorphosis.

Schulz's letters, too, are full of explanations about his mythologizing of reality, the role of art ("to be a probe sunk into the nameless"), and his need for isolation, which so directly conflicted with his need for "a friend, a kindred spirit, a partner for voyages of discovery." Reading these confessions, one often feels the same sense of trespassing that occurs while looking at the drawings; beneath what Adam Zagajewski has called "the captivating sentences of his downy prose," there lurked tremendous anguish, frustration, and sense of failure, "something like the collapse of my whole personality."

It is rare that one finds a critical piece or blurb about Schulz which does not mention Kafka; some have even dubbed him "the Polish Kafka." Like Kafka's, Schulz's letters seem to answer a need to communicate while remaining alone; "isolated from the stuff of daily life," Schulz put it. Each wrote far more letters than fiction. Both were surprisingly candid about their infirmities and neuroses in their letters; both sustained long and involved correspondences with fiancées whom they never married, instead living their adult lives with family members, working at jobs which left them little time for writing. The uncanny likenesses between these two men's lives, letters, and fiction of father-fixations and unforgettable metamorphoses is striking. While Kafka, in his notorious letter to his father, declared, "All my writing is about you," Schulz might have said something similar, having in his fiction created one of literature's most outlandish and fantastic fathers, whose own metamorphosing adventures make Gregor Samsa's seem almost pedestrian.

Schulz is credited as having helped to introduce Kafka's fiction to Poland. He wrote a lengthy and incisive afterword to *The Trial*, which appeared only in the 1936 edition. He lent his name to the translation done by Jczefina Szelínska, to encourage its publication, although he is often mistakenly credited with the translation itself. If Kafka was obsessed by space, Schulz was similarly obsessed by time. In one letter he admits to being dominated by:

> . . the virginity of time. Just as for some rajah of melancholy and insatiable disposition any woman brushed by a male glance is already tainted and thereby unfit for anything but the silkin noose, so for me

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> any piece of time someone has laid claim to, has even casually mentioned in passing, is already marred, spoiled, unfit for consumption. I can't stand people laying claim to my time. They make the scrap they touched nauseating to me. I am incapable of sharing time, of feeding on somebody's leftovers.

Time is examined and transmogrified throughout Schulz's fiction, where it occupies a starring role alongside Father, who undergoes as many mutations and transformations (crab, cockroach, horsefly) as Schulzian time. Neither Father nor time can stay put in their original format. They exist in a state of constant flux, mutating and disappearing at will. Time appears in "The Night of the Great Season" as "that great eccentric" which "begets sometimes other years, different, prodigal years which – like a sixth, smallest toe – grow a thirteenth month . . . a hunchback month, a half-wilted shoot, more tentative than real." In "The Age of Genius," Schulz explains that while ordinary events are arranged within time, strung along its length as on a thread, other events have occurred too late, that is, "after the whole of time has been distributed, divided, and allotted." What is to be done with these events:

> . . . hanging in the air, homeless, errant? Could it be that time is too narrow for all events? Could it happen that all seats within time might have been sold? Is there perhaps some kind of bidding for time?

Time, and the "framework of uninterrupted chronology" with our "scrupulous habit of reporting on used-up hours" are all but forsaken in the hilarious story, "Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass," where the "quick decomposition of time" ceases to interest people, who, instead, accept time free of vigilance. "It immediately begins to do tricks, play irresponsible jokes, and indulge in crazy clowning." The staff of the sanatorium have put back the clock, reactivating time past, with all its possibilities, so that which might have happened in "ordinary time" can be undone. Thus, Father, dead in other locales, is offered a possibility of recovery, although the staff admits that his death "throws a certain shadow on his existence here." In a letter to a critic who had written about *Cinnamon Shops*, Schulz claims that the kind of art he cares about is "precisely a regression, childhood revisited. My ideal goal is to 'mature into childhood.' " Schulz's fiction and artwork act as extended elegies to childhood, his family, and Drohobycz, keeping each alive through spectacular acts of metamorphoses.

SUSAN MIRON

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Bright Lights, Bad City

TOKYO RISING. By Edward Seidensticker. Alfred A. Knopf. $24.95.

Nostalgia, say the wags, isn't what it used to be. But the deeper problem, in Edward Seidensticker's eyes, is that the very possibility of nostalgia – the future of nostalgia – is increasingly a thing of the past. Modern Tokyo is more a place of fact than fancy. And in his yeasty new book, which traces the history of the Japanese capital from 1923 to the present, the distinguished scholar and translator delivers a highly idiosyncratic *ubi sunt* to all the city's vanished delights, describing how the geisha house has given way to the golf course as a place for business and for pleasure. The emeritus professor from Columbia begins his book by taking pains to point out that the title of his preceding volume (on Tokyo from 1868 to 1923) was *Low City, High City*, and for him the low must always take precedence over the high. All the aspiring virtues of modern Tokyo – high fashion, high finance, high-tech and high-rises – he deplores; all the smaller things – based around the low-roofed low-life of "the flower and the willow world" – he exalts. In that sense, his zesty and twinkling new book might almost be called *Tokyo Declining*. What Seidensticker loves about his adopted home are its byways and back alleyways, its curlicues and curves – the maze of its irregularity – and that is what he reproduces too: his book is a kind of discursive ramble around the pungent side streets, the crooked corners, the curious nooks of Tokyo's past. After years of translating Kawabata, Tanizaki, Mishima, and even *Genji*, Seidensticker the prolific scholar has earned the right to a holiday, and this is a book, for and about, diversion.

For all his observation of the academic's old-fashioned proprieties (not a single "I" in three-hundred forty-five pages of strikingly personal prose), Seidensticker remains very much his own man, "a quirkish man" at that, like his beloved Kafu ("the Scribbler"), blessed with a healthy appetite for all things savory and unsavory. Not the least of the pleasures of his book, in fact, comes from the sight of the raffish old professor training his scholarly eye on the outré and the risqué – diligently tabulating the number of whores in every district, solemnly assessing the virtues of "a spider man and a woman who smoked through her navel," performing a rigorous *explication du texte* on a map of a red-light district where "complete nudity and the most wanton of dances prevail." When he sorts through old demography charts, it is to tell us that, less than forty years ago, there were barely a dozen hotels in all Tokyo, as against 4,000 inns, 3,000 of which were devoted to amorous couplings

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(designated by the sign of an upside-down jellyfish). And few but Seidensticker, one suspects, would have the confidence – or the irreverence – to link the selling of five million yo-yos in a single month to Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

His in short is a genius for revealing to us the unconsidered trifle. In the years following the 1923 earthquake, he explains, shopping habits were revolutionized when department stores first allowed customers to enter without removing their shoes; one *depato* even mandated the use of underwear among its female employees (after several young women, attempting to hold down their billowing Japanese skirts while they shimmied down a fire-pole, fell to their premature deaths). During the nationalistic years that followed, one minister of education agitated, improbably, that the words *mama* and *papa* be extirpated from the lexicon, and a "grenade-throwing contest" was held during a Tokyo Giants game. And in the years that came after the war, "hubba-hubba" entered the language, the hula hoop was seen on the kabuki stage, and the aim of every aspiring actor was an *ameshon* (an acronym made up of "American" and *shomben*, meaning "urination" – an American tour, in short, long enough for a good trip to the bathroom). You think Japan is the apogee of modern efficiency? The first commercial shown on Japanese television was run silently and backwards.

Professor Seidensticker's heart, one feels, lies mostly in such vagaries, and in such places as the Casino Follies, an unlikely cabaret on the second floor of an aquarium, where children, taken to gawk at the turtles, would steal up to catch an eyeful of the leggy showgirls. And his heroes are such characters as the conscientious thief who, after taking what he wanted from a house, "would stay for a while and talk with his victims, pointing out to them the advantages of watchdogs and well-bolted doors." Not for Seidensticker the anthropologist's labored analyses, or the social scientist's mind-numbing G.N.P. figures. His is a history of the city told through the appearance of new words in the comic books (like *zuzu-u-u zuzu-u-u* for the slurping of noodles), and the falling-off of such arcane pursuits as cat-catching, silhouette paper-shows, and the art of the *benshi*, the "human subtitles" who used to declaim the dialogue of Greta Garbo and Gary Cooper in the pits of Tokyo movie theaters. As perfect complement to his unconventional tour of the city, the book reproduces a series of elegant, black-and-white snapshots of bawdy-houses, famous murderesses, and such critical sites as the Café de Cancer.

Though Seidensticker has given most of his life to Japan, he remains firmly unillusioned by it and does not hesitate to point out that the day on which most of its laws are passed is April Fools' Day (the first day of its fiscal year). He even suggests that the Lassie-like fidelity of Hachiko,

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the beloved dog commemorated in Tokyo's most famous statue, was not entirely disinterested. Yet most of his regrets are those of a disappointed lover. The central thrust of his narrative and the city it describes is the gradual shift of power from Asakusa to Shinjuku, and, by extension, from the atmospheric demimonde that fascinated Kawabata and Kafu, to an odorless, bureaucratized, impersonal world where poetry is foreign. Though this is a lament one might equally hear from a long-time resident put out by the gentrification of Greenwich Village or Covent Garden or Montmartre, Seidensticker infuses it with a peculiarly Japanese kind of sadness. Like Tanizaki in his famous hymn to shadows, or Mishima railing against the treacheries of modernity, Seidensticker is describing a Japan that seems almost to be becoming a simplification of itself, a country, one might say, that sees itself always on television. In some respects, he suggests, the problem is not that Edoites are becoming too American, but rather too Japanese; at the same time, however, they are beginning to import some decidedly Occidental moral qualms (where the old pleasure places were frankly open to the world, love-hotels now encourage furtiveness and even guilt).

Indeed, perhaps the greatest of all the book's redeeming virtues is that Seidensticker preserves a staunch – and very Japanese – refusal of all prudishness, based on his unswerving belief that sensual pleasure and a life of principle are far from incompatible. If there is anything he scrupulously opposes, it is moralism, and if there are any villains here, they are only planners, policemen, and puritans. After prostitution was banned, he notes with relish, there was a sharp rise in the number of prostitutes, and he measures Tokyo governors by the juiciness of the scandals they produce. Unapologetically opposed to everything suburban, Seidensticker lingers over the golden age of street-walking, extols the comic monologue, and laments "the absence of women from recent annals of crime." His view, in short, is that of the most exacting of aesthetes. In that, as in his conoisseurship of pleasure, and in the pleasure he finds in melancholy, the old professor proves himself an ideal successor to the writers he has always served and loved – Kafu, Kawabata, and Tanizaki – and in *Tokyo Rising* he has fashioned a tribute to them all in what is the most elegant and evergreen of Japanese forms, the pleasure-loving elegy.

PICO IYER

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Rutgers-Newark and ***Partisan Review*** *Present*

On Thursday through Saturday, April 9-11,1992, the Newark Campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey will hold a major conference on the subject of the role of writers and intellectuals in the recent transformation of Central Europe. This conference will bring to Newark a host of prominent writers, critics, and participants in the changes that are leading to a rethinking of the concept of European identity. Panelists include:

Vassily Aksyonov
Stanislaw Baranczak
Saul Bellow
Joseph Brodsky
Slavenka Drakulič
Ralph Ellison
Hans Magnus Enzensberger
Victor Erlich
Peter Esterházy
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William Phillips
Richard Pipes
Susan Sontag
Vladimir Tismaneanu
Tatyana Tolstaya
Dubrovka Ugreszic
Adam Zagajewski

The public is invited to attend free of charge

This conference will be held on the Newark Campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, at the Newark Museum and the Newark Public Library

For more information call or write Conference Director
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
601 Hill Hall • Newark • New Jersey 07102
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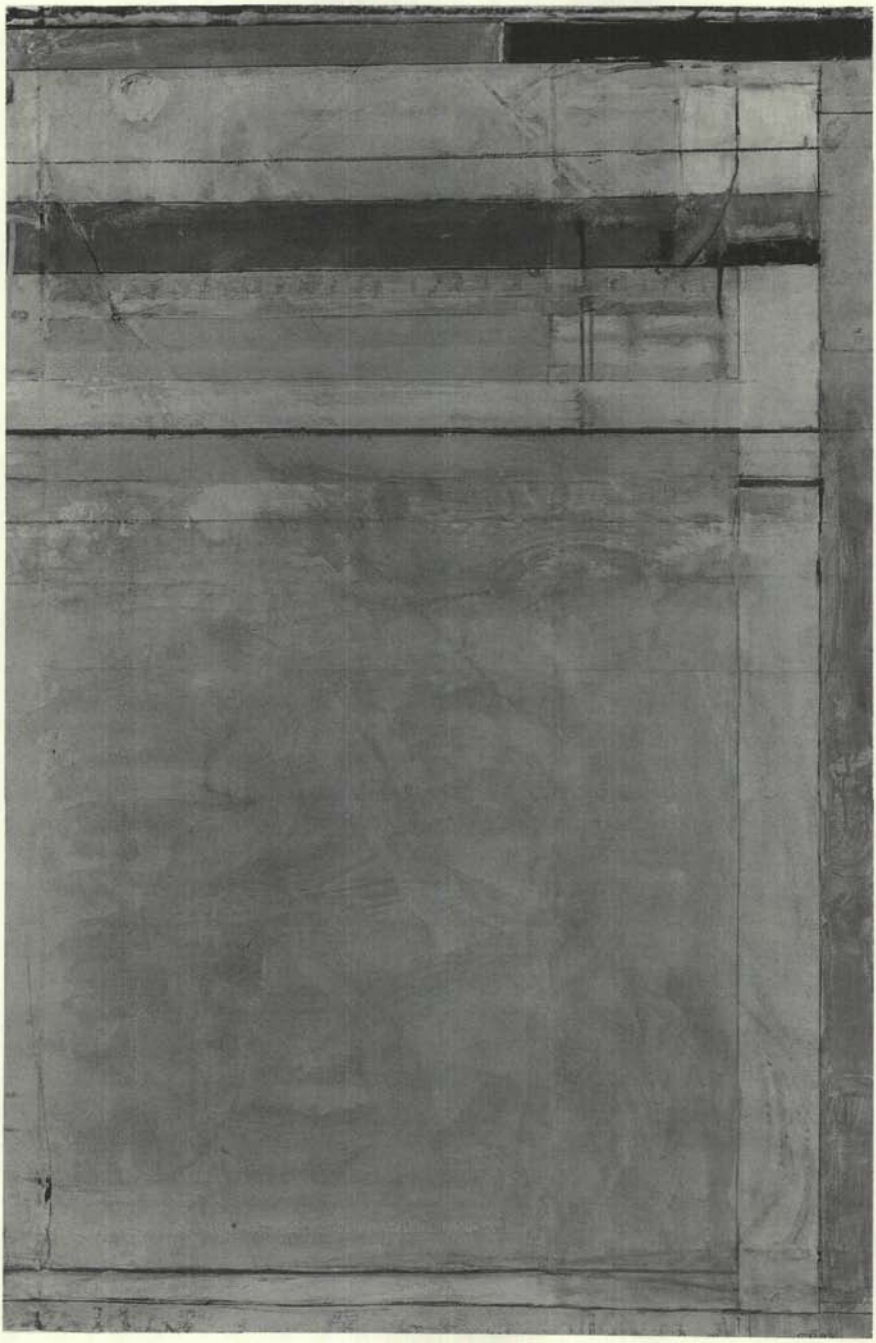

Untitled #14 (1991) by Richard Diebenkorn. Crayon, pencil, acrylic, and pasted paper on paper. 37 and 1/2 x 25 and 1/4 inches. Courtesy of Knoedler & Company.

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HEA-Enusk (1990) by Frances Barth. Acrylic on canvas. 64 x 66 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

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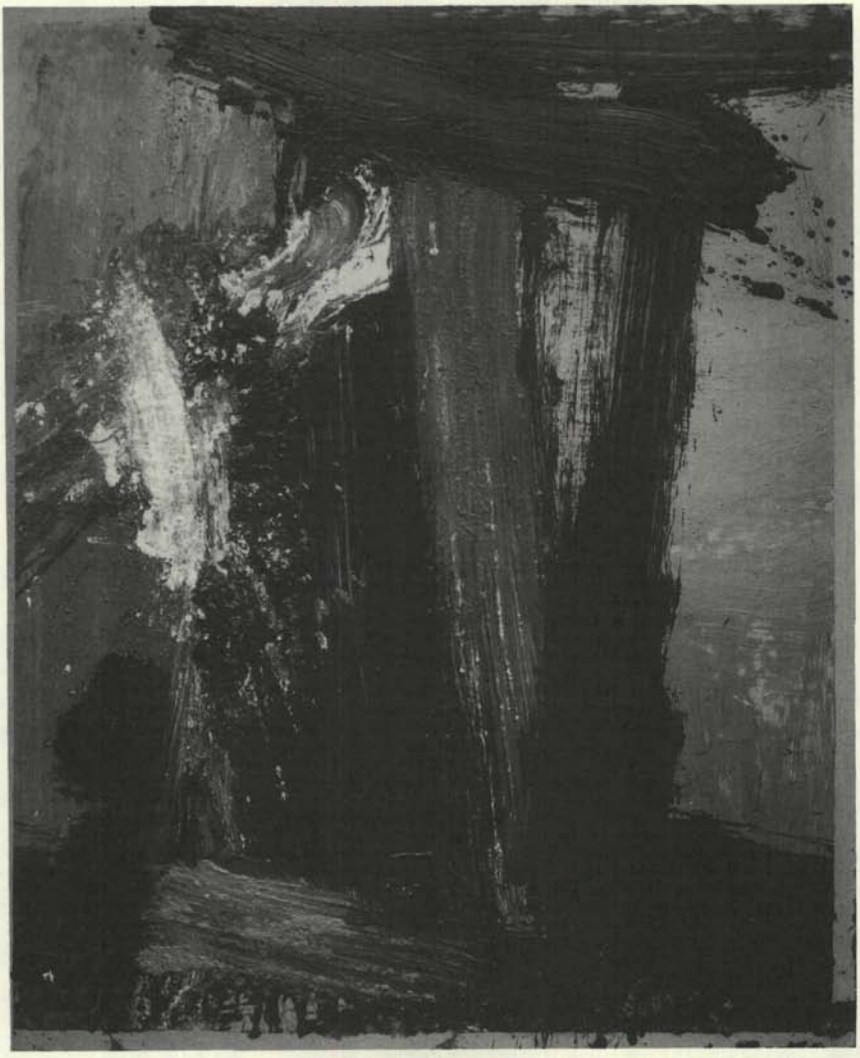

Titan (1990) by Edvins Strautmanis. Acrylic on canvas. 95 x 77 and 1/2 inches. Courtesy of Stephen Rosenberg Gallery.

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Botanica (1991) by Manel Lledos. Acrylic on canvas. 54 x 35 inches. Courtesy of Galeria Joan Prats.

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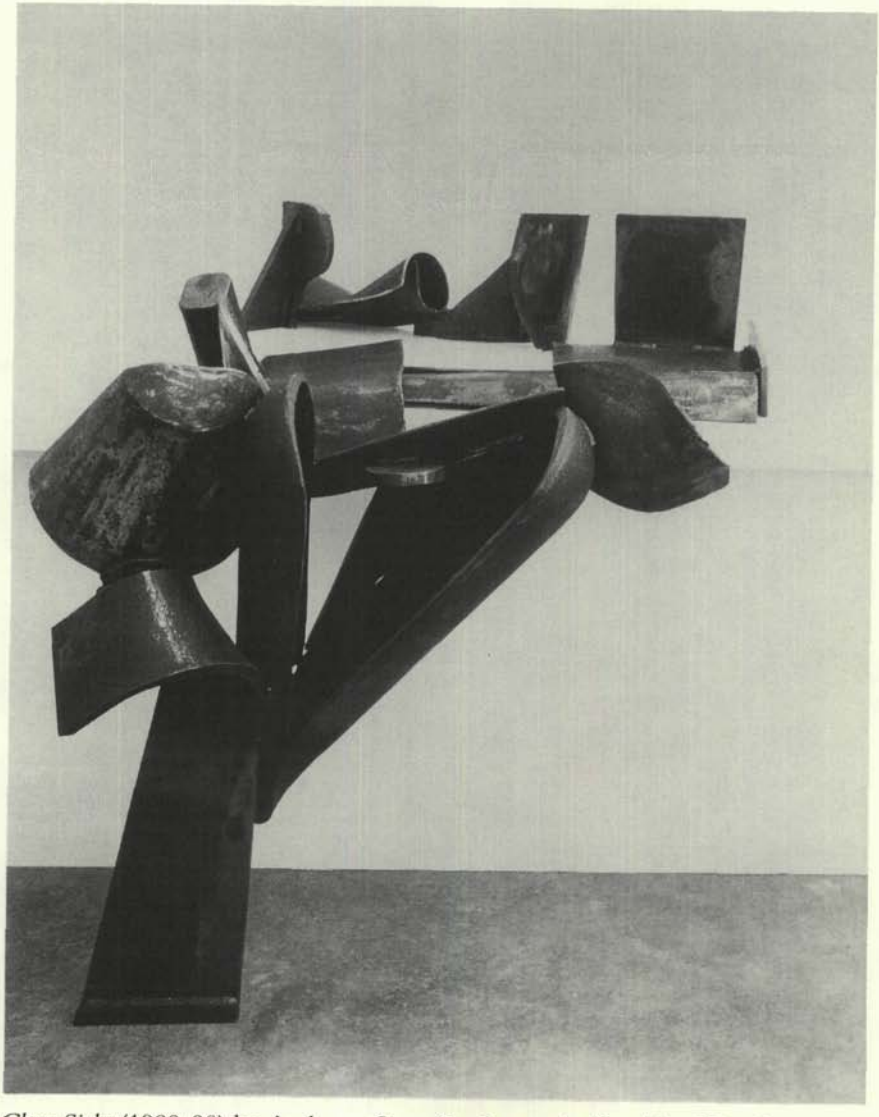

Clear Sight (1989-90) by Anthony Caro. Steel waxed. 42 x 42 x 52 inches. Courtesy of André Emmerich Gallery, New York.

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White Lies (1991) by Mia Westerlund Roosen. Plaster, pulp, and encaustic. 74 x 42 x 52 inches. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

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